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■ Saturday Special
Beatles' scions benefit from exceptional musical genes

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Former Dunding lawyer disbarred for immorality

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE SUPREME Court has disbarred a former lawyer of tycoon Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr. for recently marrying the daughter of the influential businessman in July 1992 although he was already married and had children.

"Like the proverbial thief in the night, he [redacted] A-10

Sturdy laptop takes brunt of GMA temper

By Juliet L. Javellana

Still functional despite its dents, scratches and appliqués, now a unique and valuable keepsake to remember a past cabinet — literally by grace [redacted] A-11

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Usec was sacked–GMA

Ferrer ouster part of Cabinet revamp

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

CONTRARY to the announcement of Finance Undersecretary Jaime Ongpin Ferrer Jr., his leaving his post was part of the Cabinet revamp.

President Macapagal-Arroyo made this clear in a statement a day after Ferrer told the Senate blue ribbon committee that he had resigned his irrevocable resignation in keeping with the duties undertaken.

Ferrer quit as finance undersecretary and co-chair of the Special Presidential Task Force 388 amid accusations that he had tried to extort money from those alleged to have pulled off the P1.3-billion tax credit scam. The SPTF is under fire for hampering the prosecution of those involved in the scam, allegedly to ensure the certain figures.

But Ms Arroyo informed congressional officials of the Malacañang Press Corps that Ferrer had been fired, in the process contradicting her spokesperson's statement defending the undersecretary's resignation.

"Today, it's not a misunderstanding. That's part of my revamp," she told Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye, adding that he [redacted]

Bunye said nothing.

The President made the announcement after a reporter asked about the effect of the resignation of Ferrer and of Bureau of Internal Revenue Commissioner Guillermo Parayno Jr. on the tax and customs reform programs that she had instituted to address the fiscal crisis.

In the statement he issued earlier in the day, Bunye said Ferrer had decided it "opportune to quit in the midst of serious accusations against him, and perhaps that he feel in order to clear his name for expressly and credible investigation."

He also said he [redacted]

A-10 | A-11

Feast of Peñafrancia

Faith-filled practitioners join the week-long celebration of the Feast of Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia in Camarines Sur. The traditional salt cleansing practice to impress mind and body is known as Chica. President Macapagal-Arroyo also attended the fiesta and also in accordance with the age-old tradition of [redacted] Thursday night.

Annan's wrong: Iraq war is legal, says Bush

ST. CLOUD, Minnesota—United States President George W. Bush yesterday disputed United Nations chief Kofi Annan's charge that the war on Iraq was "illegal" under the world body's charter, saying that the [redacted] approved the invasion.

The US president [redacted] down by military threats contained in the [redacted] Resolution 1441, which warned Saddam Hussein he would face "serious consequences" if he were still seeking weapons of mass destruction.

"The United Nations resolution at the same intelligence I looked at. They concluded Saddam Hussein was a threat. They voted 15-0 in the UN Security Council to Saddam Hussein to disclose, disarm or face serious consequences," he said.

"I believe when bodies say something, they better mean it," said Bush, who heads to the UN General Assembly on Monday, two years after making that same [redacted] body would be just a "debating so-

A-10 | A-11 | A-12 | A-13

Fil-Am general here for visit, does things the Asian way

By Alexis Pagsa

THE 4-YEAR-OLD boy is now an American general and commander of a major unit in the US armed forces. But he can still [redacted] his Ilocano heritage.

The highest ranking Filipino-American in the US military, Lt. Gen. Edward Soriano, flew into the country yesterday on a visit for a expo [redacted] of military establishments and upon the modernization of the Philippine military, defense officials said.

Shortly after his arrival, the commanding general of the US Army I Corps paid courtesy calls on Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz and Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Gen. Narciso Abaya in Camp Aguinaldo.

PA, A-10 | A-11

Execs who defy GMA order to cut pay face dismissal

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday stepped up her campaign against what she [redacted] as tax evasion, saying she would kick out any executive in public corporations who disobey her 2001 directive stopping lucrative bonuses, [redacted] their salaries and bonuses.

The President and Memorandum Order No. 20 would serve as basis for Budget Secretary Emilia Boncodin's ongoing review of all government-owned and -controlled corporations. The review includes setting the appropriate compensation package for GOCC board members and top executives.

Ms Arroyo told reporters at a lunch meeting in Malacañang that her proposed pay cut for GOCC directors and officers would cost to a one-time outflow.

"I expect everybody in the government to cooperate in doing sacrifices for the greater good of the people. The need for the most [redacted] is [redacted] sacrifice," she said.

She pointed out that our only key appointees but also fixed-term officials were serving at her pleasure. "If they are told to cut their pay by the end and they don't, that's insubordination. They can be taken out," she added.

But even before the Department of Budget and Management can complete its review, the President declared that only very few public corporations were violating EO No. 20, like and many GOCC di-

A-10 | A-11

FAMILY MASSACRE IN SYDNEY

3 life terms for Sef Gonzales

SYDNEY, Australia—A Filipino-born law student was sentenced to three life sentences Friday for murdering his parents and sister in their Sydney home in 2003—a savage attack that shocked [redacted] city.

In May, a New South Wales state Supreme Court jury found Sef Gonzales guilty of fatally stabbing his parents, Teddy and Betty Lanot, and stabbing, strangling and bludgeoning to death his 19-year-old sister, Debbie, with a baseball bat.

Prosecutors alleged Gonzales killed his family in July 30, 2003 to get his hands on their $1.3-million (P44) million) estate and stop his parents restricting his lifestyle.

After killing his family, Gonzales wrote graffiti on the walls of his parents' home to suggest the [redacted] were racially motivated. He then went on television appealing for help tracking down his family's killer. He was later arrested.

Sentencing Gonzales to life behind bars without prospect of parole, Justice Bruce James said the 24-year-old was not suffering from any mental condition at the time of the murders and had [redacted]

A-10 | A-11

SEF GONZALES: "Daughter by an angry [redacted]"

The killings Baguio would rather forget

By Vincent Cabreza
With Newsbreaks Lawyn Barroso

BAGUIO CITY—The murders rattled Baguio's small, [redacted] when three [redacted] years ago.

But there was little stir in the mountain city of 253,000 people when judgment came down in a Sydney court on Friday.

Baguio would rather forget.

In 2001, the brutal killings of lawyer Teddy Gonzales, his wife Betty Lanot, [redacted]

TWO COLUMNS | A-10

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2004

Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

Gov't goes after Subic smugglers

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. and Michael Lim Ubac

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo has ordered the Bureau of Internal Revenue to close down and attach the bank accounts of tax-delinquent businesses of accredited, suspected importers in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone.

"I have instructed the BIR to use all powers in its command to run after these non-paying businesses, including the power to garnish bank accounts and close down establishments once assessment of the individual tax obligations is final," the President said in statements.

The President issued the order after a final assessment by the BIR had found that the government had lost P944 million in foregone revenues from the top three car merchandisers in Subic.

"This is really a good start for the BIR," said Commissioner Guillermo Parayno, and I assure him of my full support." Mr. Arroyo said.

The BIR has already turned over reports of garnishment on the bank accounts of four Subic car dealerships under the National Internal Revenue Code (NIRC) to satisfy the tax liabilities they have incurred in the past few years, particularly the 10 percent value-added tax (VAT) on sales, it got delinquent, it is wanting to a third party, it discusses the funds, in hold, subject to a court's direction, money or property belonging to a debtor who is being sued by a creditor.

The President also ordered the justice department to assist the BIR in the ensuing legal battle after some of the Subic businesses questioned the BIR's move to court. The customers denied that part of Subic Freeport's tax incentives area the 10 percent gross income tax to assess all tax fines it honors in the bay area.

This is the President's first major directive aimed at addressing the the long-standing complaints of domestic car manufacturers against the entry of used, converted and imported vehicles into Subic. Malacañang had promised to put a stop to the practice that has significantly cuts into the sales of businesses and VAT contributions to the country.

The same may again raise the ire of lawmakers of the the Ukbesan Business Council when they met with the President last Wednesday.

Testimonies in a Senate hearing last week suggested that Subic may have become a center for car smuggling.

Customs Commissioner George Lemos said eight brand-new sedans were illegally entering the free port with approval from Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority officials.

Sen. Richard Gordon, a former SBMA chair, said as many as 5,000 cars had entered the country illegally through the SBMA "in the past six-to-nine years."

At a press conference in the house yesterday, Gordon blamed president lord and national officials in the "rampant smuggling" of eight brand-new sedans into Subic.

Gordon said that although the Department of Trade and Industry had declared that such importation was illegal under Republic Act 8556, SBMA chair Felicito Payumo continued to allow it.

In a telephone interview yesterday, Payumo belied Gordon's claim that he was behind the car smuggling in the free port.

"I don't know what he's talking about. There are no violations of law covering the importation conversion and selling of second-hand vehicles inside the free port zone," Payumo said.

He said that during Gordon's term as SBMA chair unaffiliated duties and taxes amounted to P35 million.

"The issue of conversion of right-hand-drive vehicles had been discussed during the 12th Congress. It was impossible that during Gordon's term there had been no importation of brand new vehicles at all," he said.

"How are there be smuggling when importers of reconditioned vehicles are paying duties and taxes?" he added.

In his testimony earlier this week, Lemos said the "smuggling" of mostly right-hand-drive vehicles through SBMA was being facilitated by importation permits.

He argued that SBMA officials were responsible for the profiteering of right-hand-drive cars in the free port.

Gordon said the importers in collusion with SBMA officials justify the importation by allowing the conversion of the cars into left-hand drive before they are taken out of the free port. After conversion, the cars are (or registered or titled accordingly and are then auctioned off per shipment or below.

The average registration fee for a converted car is only about P10,000 each, regardless of whether it is a car or sports utility vehicle.

Gordon said that the importers also pay bribes to evade proper payment of some P25,000 to the Land Transportation officials in Olongapo and Subic), P20,000 for Bureau of Internal Revenue, and P50,000 to SBMA. NCN a report from Allan Macatuno, PIR Central Luzon Desk

Delisting of CPP, NDF from terror list urged

By Jaya A. Gabieta
PEP Visayas Bureau

MAIL, Leyte—The head of Philippine peace panel has appealed to the United States and the European Union to remove the Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF) from the list of international terrorist groups to pave the way for the resumption of peace talks between the government and communists.

"I appeal to the US and EU governments to support the peace talks by way of addressing the issue, not on the delisting," Silvestre Bello III, chair of the government's panel, said the latter, assures here rewarding adding the rebel group should be judged on the basis of their participation in the government's peace program.

Adding this appeal is meant to show that the national government is serious in its quest to ending the long-running insurgency problem of the country, Bello added.

Bello said he blamed the inclusion of the CPP-NDF in the list of terrorist groups by the US and some EU member nations for the aborted Aug. 24-30 meeting of the government and the CPP-NDF.

Those "technical," he assured, would all be addressed to end their longest insurgency problem.

19 'dangerous' patients bolt Bicol mental hospital

CAMP SIMEON OLA, Legazpi City—Nineteen psychiatric patients, all former jail inmates, bolted from the government-run Gaitan Mental Hospital in PEL Camarines Sur, on Tuesday night, triggering fear among nearby residents.

Chief Supt. Restituto Mayo-Ala, Bicol Region police chief, said they considered the escapees "dangerous to the public" but he urged local residents to remain calm.

Initial reports said the escapees were former jail inmates sent to the hospital after being declared insane by courts.

Responding policemen from Pili recaptured five patients.

Hospital said the 19 men face criminal charges due to shady conduct, arranged murder, homicide, robbery with arsenal assault.

The patients escaped by sawing off iron grills at the back of the cell. Ronnie Lovejo, PIR Southern Luzon Bureau. With AP report

Armed 'foreigners' seen in South

COTABATO CITY—Ten suspects, wielding assault rifles, were seen in the company of Abu Sayyaf bandits roaming the towns of Sultan Kudarat province, the military reported Friday.

Col. Gerry Ashadam, commander of the Army's 604th Infantry Brigade, said military agents could not ascertain the nationalities of the foreigners, but they were Middle Eastern looking men logging high-powered paraphernalia on their backs.

He said the foreigners were initially sighted on Monday.

"They could be Afghan, Pakistani or citizens from Arab-speaking countries," a military intelligence officer told the reporters.

Ashadam said members of Barangay Bai Sandikuang in Sagonbenuan town had reported the presence of about 40 Abu Sayyaf gunmen led by Indian Engkot and the foreigners.

Villagers described the foreigners as tall, wearing heavy boots and could not speak the local dialect.

Engkot, a Basilan-based Abu Sayyaf leader, had fled the island province and has been seen frequented in Sultan Kudarat last week. Ashadam said.

The military has launched a massive manhunt for Engkot's group, who also took four Tausug marines as hostages on Monday. The fate of the Siatagos remains unknown.

Western Commander hoped the MILF and the two under this week said to be aiding the Abu Sayyaf group targeted the same town of 47th infamy," Ashadam said.

Following is where Abu Sayyaf chieftain Khadaffy Janjalani had reportedly fled to avoid the military.

His group had merged with a local gang and some MILF rebels according to an earlier military report. Charlie C. Señase, PEP Mindanao Bureau and AP

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PCU nips Perpetual, nears 8-year dream

GAMES MONDAY (*Rizal Coliseum*)
2 p.m.—San Beda vs Letran (Jrs-Game 1 Finals)

By Jasmine W. Payo

SOPHOMORE Jason Castro drained a three-pointer with five seconds left yesterday to bring Philippine Christian U within a game of fulfilling an eight-year championship dream.

The long, mighty heave, taken from the right flank, bubbled before sinking for a 70-68 PCU win over University of Perpetual Help Altas in Game 1 of the NCAA senior basketball final at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum.

His team was behind by two when he took the off-balanced jumper, and the hero in the close, rugged match swore it was a gift from God.

"*Swerte lang, regalo ng Diyos*. I saw the time at five seconds, so I just took the shot," said the 18-year-old Castro.

PCU shoots for the crown when it again clashes with Perpetual in Game 2 of the best-of-three championship series on Wednesday at the Araneta Coliseum.

The Dolphins moved within a win of their first-ever NCAA crown without head coach Loreto Tolentino, slapped a one-game suspension for excessive complaining in PCU's semifinal win against Letran last Wednesday.

Tolentino's 25-year-old son Elvis took over the bench.

"My dad hugged and thanked me after the game. He stayed in the dugout the whole time. We just followed our plan. Whoever is open for a three, take it. If not, just make sure we get a basket," he said.

Robert Sanz, who topscored with 18 points, presided in the closing minutes to give PCU a 66-65 advantage.

But Noy Javier completed a three-point play to push the Altas ahead, 68-66, only 44 seconds remaining.

Perpetual could have padded its lead but Vladimir Joe missed his two charities in the final 28 seconds.

Another Perpetual miscue in the dying seconds that saw Javier turning the ball over during inbound, nailed its fate.

Castro's clutch trey also overshadowed Javier's season-record of seven triples for a game-high 32 points.

In junior play, the Letran Squires arranged a best-of-three championship series against defending champion San Beda Cubs after dismissing the PCU Baby Dolphins, 78-68, in their semifinal playoff.

The scores:

PCU 70—Sanz 18, Espires 16, Castro 16, Solis 6, Garrido 4, Ritaga 4, Amparado 2, Cecilia 2, Baiga 2, Santos 0, Generalao 0.

PERPETUAL 68—Javier 32, Guanco 10, Joe 7, Mico 6, Refuerzo 5, Bautista 5, Barroga 3, Apor 0.

Quarters: 22-21, 34-34, 59-51, 70-68.

CARLOS Martin Cecilia of PCU does a bone-jarring dunk. RUDY ESPIRAS

NO BACKING OUT: Obet Pagdanganan explains a point during yesterday's press conference. With him are Eric Buhain (left) and Cito Dayrit. JOEY LUSTE

Enough cash to host SEA Games—Obet

By Marc Anthony Reyes

NATIONAL officials involved in the preparations for the 2005 Southeast Asian Games yesterday tried to put an end to money worries over the hosting of the event.

If each of the 14,000 foreign athletes and officials would only spend at least $1,000, the country can easily recoup its P800-million budget for the Games.

That's according to SEAG chief organizer Roberto "Obet" Pagdanganan, who said the country could be assured of earning the money.

Pagdanganan said there's no need to lose sleep over the SEAG price tag because the country stands to gain more from holding the Games for the first time since 1991.

The Philippine SEA Games Organizing Committee chair made this assurance yesterday during a press conference attended by Philippine Sports Commission chair Eric Buhain, Philippine Olympic Committee president Cielo Dayrit, weightlifting boss Rep. Monico Puentevella and taekwondo's Robert Aventajado, among others.

"We are here to finally end all doubts as to our capability to host the Games," said Buhain. "We have done it before (1991)."

Puentevella earlier proposed that 10 percent of the slashed pork barrel of each of the 236 congressmen be allocated to the SEAG fund. He estimated the amount to reach P600 million.

PBA-BAP team-up key to hosting Asian caging

By Juno Navarro

A WORKING agreement between the Philippine Basketball Association and the Basketball Association of the Philippines would be a tremendous boost in the country's bid to host the 2007 Asian Basketball Confederation men's championship.

"If the talks between the PBA and the BAP become a success, I'm 80-percent sure we're going to secure the hosting," said former ABC secretary general Moying Martelino yesterday.

Martelino, secretary general from 1989-1998, said ABC officials would find it difficult to turn down the Manila hosting once the PBA and the BAP join hands in a bid to come up with a formidable Philippine team not only for Asian Games, but the ABC as well.

That's aside from the fact that Manila's last hosting of the ABC men's championship came 21 years ago, Martelino stressed.

"It's about time we bring the ABC to Manila. They (ABC officials) know that this is a basketball-crazy country and they'll be excited to come back here," said Martelino, who was executive director of the 1973 Manila ABC men's championship, which RP won over South Korea.

The ABC serves as the qualifying tournament to the World Championships and Olympics. The top two teams in the event will automatically clinch slots reserved for Asian countries.

The 2007 ABC could be the biggest opportu-

PBA-BAP AT

Bibat triumphs in the din by 3

By Musong R. Castillo

PLAYING before a hostile crowd, Michael Bibat pulled out all stops yesterday to win the Singapore Amateur championship at the Sentosa golf club's tough Serapong course.

The 20-year-old Bibat almost lost a seven-stroke advantage heading into the last five holes, regrouping in the final three to submit a 78, six-over-par, and win by three shots over New Zealander Mike Purser, who shot 73.

In winning his first title out of the junior ranks, Bibat pooled a 290 total.

Bibat nipped on a triple bogey on No. 15 as rains and strong winds swept the course, allowing Purser and Singapore's Choo Tze Huang to close in by two.

A huge gallery jeered Bibat no end, forcing compatriot Tommy Manotoc, who was playing a couple of flights ahead, to pull out and lend Bibat a morale boost.

Choo yielded three strokes in the last three to finish third at 294 after a 77.

Meanwhile, in the NGAP evaluation series for the World Amateur team, Jusic Pagunsan shot a leisurely 74 to rule the 144-hole event with a 564 total.

Jun Bernis—if Bibat's scores in Singapore will not count—finished second with a 576 tally after a 73 at the Riviera's Langer course.

Anya Tanpinco topped the women's side after an 83.

House eyes immediate passage of tax amnesty bill

By Carlos Conde

THE HOUSE is rushing the approval of the proposed tax amnesty bill aimed at raising at least P9 billion in additional revenues for the cash-strapped government.

Floor deliberations on House Bill No. 3903 will start next week before Congress goes on a brief recess starting Sept. 23. The tax amnesty bill was earlier endorsed for approval by the House ways and means committee through committee report No. 29.

The President's Legislative Liaison Office was given a copy of the committee report with a letter requesting to have the measure certified as urgent by President Macapagal-Arroyo," House Minority Leader Rep. Frederick Roquito Kelley Dimpo Cruz said.

Kelley also said the ways and means committee will conduct hearings on another pending tax measure, the indexation of the so-called ad valorem tax on tobacco and alcohol products, during the congressional break.

The ad valorem component is projected to generate P14 billion in fresh revenues.

On Tuesday, the ways and means committee chaired by Rep. Arth Lopez (NPC, Tarlac) completed deliberations on the tax amnesty bill. Lopez will sponsor the measure on the floor next week.

Under the bill, all persons and parties running to avail of tax amnesty will be required to file a tax amnesty return accompanied by a statement of assets, liabilities and networth (SALN) as of Dec. 31, 2003.

The requirement for the filing of the SALN will cover "taxpayers, including individuals and organizations, but not otherwise required to file their income from any properties or activities conducted for profit," said Lopez.

Lopez said those tax-exempt entities include church and religious organizations which are already covered by the requirement.

Lopez said there are existing regulations which will guide the Bureau of Internal Revenue in determine which activities by these church and religious organizations are deemed commercial or profit generating and the corresponding rates thereto.

"These activities will now be taxable," Lopez said.

He list requires the following persons without penalties to comply with the requirement for one additional period seven years to file their SALN:

"Individuals, whether employees, self-employed professionals

"Trust and estates,

"Tax-exempt organizations with taxable income,

"Taxpayers with subscribed capital of above P10 million,

"Taxpayers with subscribed capital of above P20 million up to P50 million,

"Taxpayers with subscribed capital of above P50 million up to P100 million,

"Taxpayers with subscribed capital of above P100 million up to P500 million,

"Taxpayers with subscribed capital of P1 million and above.

"Other juridical entities, including but not limited to cooperatives and foundations that have taxable income as of Dec. 31, 2004.

The bill provides that taxpayers with assessments for criminal, valuation or estate pending with the BIR, may avail of the tax amnesty equivalent to 10 percent of the assessed tax.

Upon full compliance with the conditions of the amnesty, a taxpayer shall be immunized and granted, subject to certain conditions, civil, criminal and administrative penalties.

The bill, however, provides that tax amnesty cannot be extended to the following:

"Withholding agents with respect to their withholding tax liabilities

"Those with pending cases falling under the jurisdiction of the Presidential Commission on Good Government.

"Those with pending cases involving unexplained or unlawfully acquired wealth or under the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act.

"Those with pending investigations involving violations of the Anti-Money Laundering Act.

"Those with pending cases for tax evasion and other criminal offenses under the Bureau of Internal Revenue Code of 1997.

AFP cuts rice subsidy for soldiers' families

RICE subsidies for soldiers' families have been cut off in line with the government's belt-tightening program, a military spokesman said yesterday.

The defense department has cut up a bill of P927 million with the government's grant making non-incentive subsidies, which have been suspended, Lt.Col. Daniel Lucero said.

He said the subsidies were suspended starting this year as the armed forces find ways for funds earned to improve soldiers' salaries.

Subsidies will resume only when the military settles its accounts with the state-run National Food Authority, he added.

President Macapagal-Arroyo last month ordered austerity measures on government agencies to avert what she described as a looming financial crisis.

AFP

Christmas cheer hinges on tax bills, says GMA

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

VISITORS Filipinos will have a bleak or joyous Christmas this year still depend on whether Congress manages to approve through the congressional recipes, according to President Macapagal-Arroyo.

A lot of things depend on the passage of the revenue measures, chief of which was the "signal" it would give to the world, said the business community that the Philippines has the will to address a deepening fiscal crisis, the President said at a luncheon with the Manila Rotary Club yesterday.

According to Ms Arroyo, if the country gives out such a signal, it would result in a reduction of the interest on the debt that the Philippines has to pay, thereby freeing more funds in the national budget for direct services.

"What we can give for direct services is what would determine what kind of Christmas we will have," the President said.

Ms Arroyo said that despite the fiscal crisis, the Philippines has maintained the confidence of foreign investors as the country's GDP will present increase in investment this year and the last that economic and financial institutions are still extending loans to the Philippines.

"So the worry still is why people are still loading it so in the local markets. But, really, they're waiting for the signal of orderliness," she said.

She said increasing revenue collections next year, that's why she urged the 11th Congress to pass the eight new tax measures that are submitted, she said.

"We just have to show that everybody is willing to make sacrifices," she said.

The President has set the issue on economy and sacrifice as the struggles to keep a lid on the ballooning budget deficit. She has asked the Metro among his boss to stop setting distinctive needs, imperatives, for smaller projects to be served in private projects.

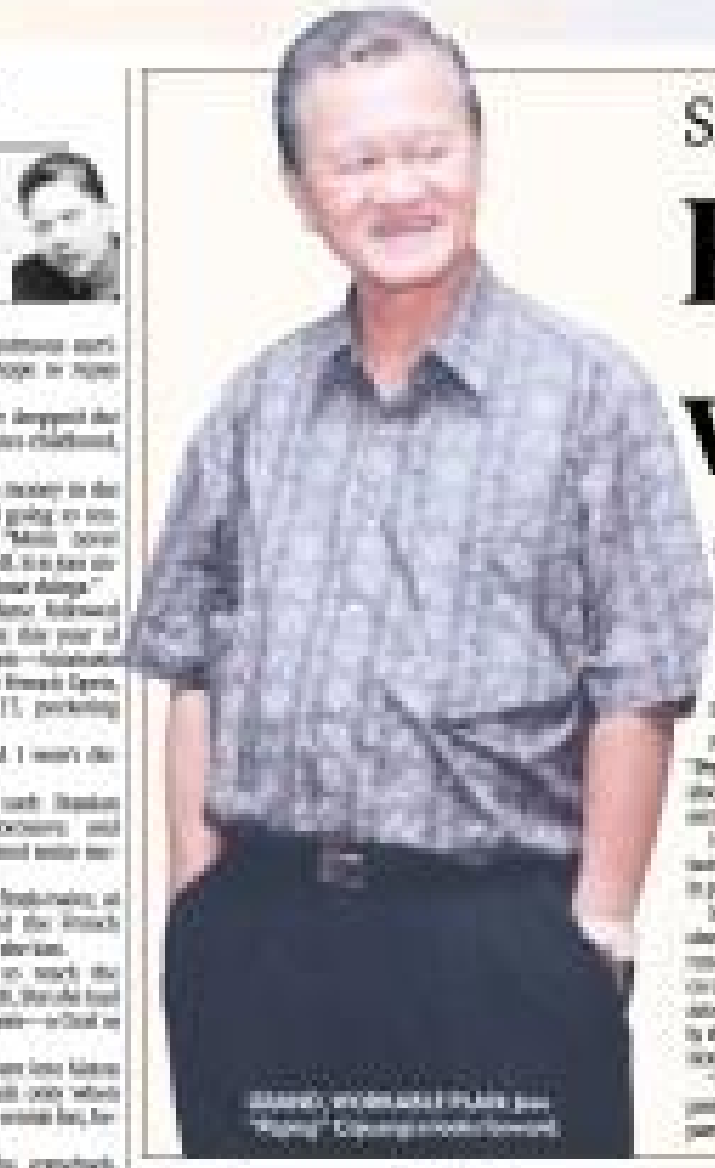
But for the President's landmark, with Prince expenses yesterday, she said that economic decisions are not based on politics.

"I submitted them [the proposed tax measures] to Congress. I told Congress, however that my economic managers do not have a stroke of politics. I'm just telling them we have to save P82 billion. It's the bottom line," she said.

Casing Kuznetsova

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza



SAVING RP SPORTS

Peping offe win-win me

By Marc Anthony Reyes

THE TOKTOK politician who wants to take over the Philippine Olympic Committee has groundbreaking plans, among them the selling of the historic Rizal Memorial Sports Complex and the establishment of a new sprawling training center in Clark Field, Pampanga.

Former Cebu Rep. Jose "Peping" Cojuangco yesterday also declared his candidacy for serving Philippine sports.

He said these plan to engage various other businessmen in public-private partnership projects.

In the first public statement since announcing his plans to run for POC president, Cojuangco underscored the potential among sports bodies, particularly the national sports associations.

"I have experience in the past, especially in politics when personalities differ, when I think we are bigger than what we think are fighting over," Cojuangco said in his statement. "I'm not promising miracles in every aspect but I think we can improve and I think we can improve a lot. I believe the programs that I plan to implement."

Cojuangco's agenda, if he wins over incumbent POC chief Cielo Daroy in November, is the establishment of a national training center in the former Clark Air Base in Pampanga, which he envisions as the Olympic sports hub of the Philippines.

He said 200 hectares of land

Milo qualifying race goes to Butuan

Parag twice

Casing Kuznetsova

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza

Take extra year in HS, DECS urges flunkers

By Dona Z. Pazolbuga

PUBLIC high schools have been told to accommodate most of their freshmen students in the "bridge program" following the dismal results of the second High School Readiness Test.

Education Secretary Florencio Abad has ordered public high school officials to convince parents of students who flunked the second HSRT administered on Aug. 21 to take the extra school year.

"On the basis of the decision of parents, school administrator[s] should organize new or additional sections for the bridge program in their respective schools," Abad said in a memo dated Sept. 8.

The new bridge sections should be in place by the start of the second grading period, which begins Sept. 16.

The bridge program is a one-long intensive tutorial on English, Science and Math for incoming high school freshmen who are deemed to be slow learners.

The HSRT, which was first administered on May 24, was supposed to determine which of the 1.2 million incoming freshmen in public high schools would take the bridge program.

But because parents protested against an added year of high school, the DepEd reformed and made the bridge program optional this school year.

The DepEd claims that at least 300,000 freshmen students voluntarily entered the program based on preliminary data.

Preliminary results showed that about 80 percent of the nearly one million high school freshmen who took the second HSRT flunked the 50-item test. The cut-off score was 30 percent.

Abad, who assumed office only last Sept. 1, ordered teachers to discuss the test results with the parents "so they can decide whether or not to transfer their children to the bridge program."

High court upholds gun ban

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE SUPREME Court has affirmed its decision to uphold the nationwide gun ban that President Macapagal-Arroyo declared in 2003.

In a nine-page resolution dated Sept. 7, the high court denied "with finality" the motion for reconsideration filed by former Interior General Francisco Chavez, who had questioned the gun ban's legality.

"The court cautioned in deciding with finality the said motion for reconsideration, as the basic issues raised therein have been passed upon by this court and no substantial arguments were presented to warrant the reversal of the questioned decision," the tribunal said.

Justices Alicia Austria-Martinez and Conchita Carpio-Morales did not participate in the deliberation on the case since they were on official leave.

June 9 ruling

On June 9, the high court unanimously upheld the gun ban, saying that hunting arms is not a constitutionally-protected right.

Chavez filed a motion for reconsideration, saying that the gun ban should be voided since the Philippine National Police has not returned a total of P128 million worth of fees that gun owners like him paid to get the right to Carry Firearms Outside of Residence (CFFOR).

"Upon the revocation of their PTCFORs, petitioners and other gun owners did not get anything in return for the fees they paid to the government. They shelled out money for the required fees. The government, by cancelling the PTCFORs, grabbed up the gun owners' money," Chavez said.

Scandalous scare

There are an estimated 51,000 holders of PTCFORs who paid a minimum of P4,000 each before the gun ban.

"The result is a scandalous scam involving about P128 million" he said. "Even this honorable court's decision justify this scandalous robbery?"

The President declared the gun ban in January 2003 and enforced then-PNP Chief Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. to cancel existing PTC-FORs and suspend the issuance of these permits. Ebdane then issued a set of guidelines to implement the gun ban.

Citizen's right

Chavez insisted that citizens have the basic right to defend themselves, noting that a gun ban does not deter criminals from committing crimes.

"Even if the Philippine constitution does not expressly grant the right to bear arms, Chavez have the inherent right to protect their lives, which cannot be taken away by any law," he said.

'No significant effect'

He cited a study made by lawyer Boy M. Manuel Villasor of the National Defense College, which showed that a gun ban has "no significant effect" on the country's total crime volume (TCV).

Villasor noted that despite a six-month gun ban during the 1998 elections, TCV increased by 189 percent.

There were gun bans during the election years 1992 and 1995, yet firearm-related crimes during those years increased by 127.15 percent and 114.1 percent, respectively.

'No truth'

From 1993 to 1997, the number of PTCFORs increased from 20,957 to 60,448 but TCV decreased by 26.5 percent. In 1996, the number of PTCFORs went down to 43,458, but TCV increased by 69 percent, Villasor said.

The study showed that there was "no truth" to the belief that "more guns result in more crimes." A gun ban will not stop a criminal from committing a crime because criminals will simply choose another weapon, Chavez said.

He added that the PNP should not be allowed to simply revoke gun licenses.

Once a person is granted a license, "and such a person complies with all the conditions therein," the license "cannot be revoked unless the grantee violates the conditions set forth therein," he said.

"To rule otherwise would cause havoc on society. If a license duly issued may be revoked at the whim and caprice of the issuing authority then the exercise of the people's rights and privileges would be at the mercy of the those in power," Chavez said.

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South Korean carrier granted additional flights to Clark

THE PHILIPPINES will grant additional flights to South Korea's Asiana Airlines to Clark airport, a former US airbase in Pampanga, Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza said yesterday.

The additional flights will be granted during bilateral talks on air service agreements between the Philippines and South Korea later this year, Mendoza said.

"We will give Asiana additional rights to fly to Clark. We plan to give the Korean government additional frequency entitlements," Mendoza said, adding that the Philippines expects more flights and tourists to South Korea in return.

Mendoza did not say how many more flights would be granted to Asiana.

Asiana makes the chartered flights a week to Clark airport on top of seven commercial and two cargo flights to the capital.

The South Korean carrier has been planning to increase flights to the Philippines to maximize its share of the growing Korean tourist market here.

Airport authorities have said they will develop Clark into a major international gateway in the east of at least P2 billion.

The sprawling Clark Airbase, once one of the largest overseas US airbases, was abandoned by US forces in 1991 after the eruption of nearby Pinatubo volcano damaged its facilities. AFP

Lorenzo defends using gov't funds for private plane

PRESIDENTIAL aide Luis Lorenzo yesterday defended using government funds to fuel a private jet amid an official crackdown on conspicuous consumption meant to head off a looming fiscal crisis.

Lorenzo could need a repair by Investment magazine that he used government money to pay for jet fuel worth P2.5 million on official trips across the archipelago in his previous post as agriculture secretary.

The item for officials on government trips is to fly business class on commercial airlines.

Lorenzo, who was reassigned to become a presidential adviser on Napoleonic reform projects earlier this year, said he needed efficient transport to cover a lot of ground to hold farmers' rice recoveries agriculture, the sector that employs the most number of Filipinos.

"Actually I was only charged for the price of gasoline. The cost of [leasing] the plane was not ever included," he said over dubbed radio.

"I had to cover a big area because I was a hands-on manager who followed up to ensure that projects are completed," he said.

Arroyo last month imposed austerity measures on government agencies in a bid what she described as a looming fiscal crisis.

Non-essential foreign travel for officials was banned and government offices were ordered to trim their use of fuel and electricity by 10 percent. Arroyo also cut the number of vehicles in her security convoy. AFP

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...ational athletes currently in the team.

"When we promote a good program, we will find lots more of people willing to help," said Cojuangco. "Some programs will be a figure—the constituency's love for support."

As the new Philippine Olympic Committee president, Cojuangco said he is confident the country can raise funds for the training.

He vows to collect more money and support to the government's sports and the private sector.

"When everywhere a medal is won—and I think I have gained enough support to unite Philippine sports—we can appeal to [government] to help," he said.

Cojuangco, who had served as president of the national bowling and golf associations, said he is also compensated from added income entering should we be the exclusive grant of his athletic interests. Besides, it is "disinterested bidding and discipline."

"No gold medals for sale, will carefully follow [who are we] things straight."

He also defended himself from claims that he may not be immediately available due to government duties as POC president.

"I have been a congressman for three consecutive terms, I was a former governor, vice governor and mayor," said Cojuangco. "If I said I'm involved by my new mission, how could I have been all those years."

Tigers pin 2nd loss on Koreans

THE CCSA-CDAA Tigers edged the SE Knights, 93-90, Thursday night in the Philippine Basketball Association Intercollegiate League football series at the Ninoy Aquino Stadium.

Williams Asereko netted two free throws and the Tigers defended well in the last five seconds to hold the more experienced Knights down.

The Bus Lanta Bullcats also beat the Knights, 106-103, Wednesday.

Mr. Jaguar Love Wilde, who selected Ice Pharmacia to its successful campaign in the 2003 Governors Cup, topped the 28 points that the Tigers held their ground on a well-balanced attack.

Roman Anadilon, Dan Song Hyun recently made the shots as he made them straight strike that brought the Knights back 0-65, 89-89, in the closing seconds.

Tigers (93)

CCSA (3-3)—Johnson 4, Asereko 11, Kim Hak 12, Dalin 0, Jung 7, Hwangbo 0, Seok 0, Cervantes 0, Angeles 0, Hwang 0.

SCHOOLS (3)—Kim Ki 0, Choi 8, Cho 0, Lee 0, Lang 0, Park 0, Lee 0, Lee Jong 0.

Scores (1-2): 21-20, 46-46, 65-65, 89-89, 93-90

MARY Hartfield's tough defense helped Coca-Cola subdue the SE Knights.

PBA-BAP team-up . . .

From page A1

ary for the country to qualify for the 2004 Beijing Olympic Games.

The 29-for last played in the 1991 Manila Olympics.

Shandon said although China, Korea, Japan and even 2000 Asian Games host Qatar are expected to bid, the BAP could persuade ABC officials to join the Philippines a chance since these countries have taken some heating the moves in the last 10 years.

"If I were in the BAP I'd convince ABC officials a place in the hosting by using the fact that it has held two earlier regional tournaments, which qualified as Olympic," added Shandon.

Traditionally, key ABC officials, led by the president, vice president, secretary-general and treasurer, choose the host country while the rest of the board members tag along.

"The bidder should have a good standing as a member of the ABC. In 1991, everybody was happy with the hosting, as I guess we wouldn't be elected if we any," said Shandon.

"Money is not the problem. We could generate funds through sponsorships. What's important are the things that we would offer as hosts," he added.

A total of 36 nations will be vying for the remaining slots.

Jaguars earn another shot at UCAA title

PHILIPPINE School of Business administration outscored back No. 2 seed La Salle-Dasmariñas, 69-64, to book a return trip to the finals of the 3rd Intercollegiate Collegiate Athletic Association (UCAA) basketball championship at the Pasay Sports Complex.

Rong Sagala supported the PSBA with 19 points, including eight in the final period as the Jaguars overcame a 6-point deficit.

"We're thankful we managed to get through," said Jaguars coach Moises Salita.

The Jaguars, runners-up to defend champion St. Francis of Assisi the past two seasons, move up versus Emilio Aguinaldo College for the title of the eight-school event backed by Asahi, Mineral Waterworks, Modern's Pizza, Nine Balance shoes, Nike Air Fire Running Shoes and Mikasa balls.

Game 1 of the best-of-three title series is on Sept. 28 at the Pasay Sports Complex.

The score:

PSBA—Sagala 19, Pua 11, Mendoza 10, Ramos 7, Del Rosario 6, Manalo 5, Cabrera 4, Medina 3.

DASMA—Dumlao 16, Ryan 15, Ryan 11, Bautista 6, Ramos 6, Aquino 5, Mendoza 3.

Scores: 11-15, 31-31, 50-50, 69-64

Guidicelli pulls off 2nd karting sweep

CEBU CITY—Cebu Racing Group top driver Mauro Guidicelli extends double-victory win weekend in the seventh leg of the 2004 RSO-Shell Superkarting Series at the Mactan Circuit.

Guidicelli, backed up by Pendragon, Oakley and CBC Euro, posted the fastest lap time of 39.05 seconds as he crossed the checkered crown with top 4 triumph in the Rotax Max Juniors class over Manny Agulan of Davao Aviators and third place Mark Dungarvin of MMM Racing.

Guidicelli then dominated the pro-Aero Formula Open class over defending champion Gilberto Rodriguez of Rebel Racing and third placer Allan Ly of Associates PCB Racing Team.

Sharing honors with Guidicelli was former ex-ski rider Jun Jun Gonzales of the CBC who ruled the Formula Rotax Max Expert division over Martin Jose Fito Lichauco, Leo Rodriguez of MMM Racing Team Rookieguy and Marcel Tiamo.

It was the second double victory for Guidicelli, he achieved the same feat in the second leg last April.

In the first heat last Saturday, Guidicelli outlasted a fender-rumbling ordeal in the 12th lap line crash built to cop the second heat over Villalon and Ly.

It was smooth sailing for Guidicelli in the final heat where he garnered the lead of the pole beating rookie Ly 2-lap win.

Rudy Villalon of Mindilla took fourth place in the Formula Open while Mark Rodriguez, Mathew Rodriguez of Rebel Pits and Blake Co of CBC rounded fifth, sixth and seventh, respectively.

The other class winners were Robert Ocak, Rebel Racers and Rambo Ruano.

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BIR 'resibo' text promo finalist in S'pore IT tilt

THE BIR Dial-1 Internal Revenue "Resibo, I-Txt ang Resibo" promo is among the finalists of the 2004 MIS Asia innovation awards which will be held next week in Singapore. More than 130 nominations were received by this awards committee.

Deputy Commissioner Lilia C. Guillermo of the bureau's Information Systems Group was informed by the organizers that the BIR's SMS-based promo had been shortlisted by the awards committee.

The prestigious Innovation Awards, initiated annually by IDG Asia, pays tribute to distinctive projects and programs in enterprise deployment and the use of information technology in Asia. Among its past members are CIBC Asia, Supreme Court of Singapore, Bank Asia Indosuez Hong Kong Jockey Club.

Guillermo said that "Resibo, I-Txt ang Resibo" was featured as a finalist under the category awesome application.

The BIR also announced yesterday the revival of the Resibo project to celebrate the bureau's centennial next October in "Resibo, I-Txt ang Resibo 2004." Taxpayers may submit entry receipts with a minimum of P100 purchase. Valid entries are entitled to a share from Dept. 4 to Dec. 15, 2004.

That's eight winners, who will receive P25,000 each, will be drawn from the 10 winners to receive on Oct. 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29; Nov. 5, 12, 16 and 26, and Dec. 3 and 10. Must be winners for the draws on Oct. 29 and Dec. 26 will receive P1 million each. For the Christmas draw on Dec. 17, three winners will win P1 million each while the owner of receipts in the draw will receive P10,000 each.

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

Who will be next Tony Tan Caktiong?

Can't Tan Philippines produce another Tony Tan Caktiong?

Caktiong, president and chief executive officer of Jollibee Foods Corporation and the first Entrepreneur Of The Year Philippines winners believes another Filipino can.

The founder of the phenomenally successful 1-billion-buck-chain he might summon him or is the country last May when he bagged the World Entrepreneur Of The Year title in cities held in Monaco.

Caktiong said he'll see in early Filipinos who possess the qualities of excellent entrepreneurs which he described as the capacity to think beyond themselves, to persevere even amid trials and resistance to dream of a brighter future.

"At the eight in Monaco when his name was called, Caktiong said what immediately came to his mind were the faces of people who have helped build Jollibee.

"I want them to represent the multitudes of people who make our country proud."

But, he said, "it's time for another entrepreneur to inspire others."

Who will be next Caktiong?

The answer lies in the ongoing search by the ABV Foundation and its partner agencies for the Entrepreneur Of The Year Philippines 2004.

The awards, considered the Oscars of international business, was launched in the United States by Ernst & Young in 1986 to honor entrepreneurs who had created and sustained successful, growing businesses with private, business leaders and entrepreneurs are now participating in the process which is year on its second year in the Philippines.

ABV Foundation runs the program here with partner agencies that include the Donjuan Journal of Trade and Industry, Students Association of the Philippines College of Business Administration (SPCBA), The Caligraphy Divine Bank, Jose Miguel Corporation, ORIX and ELM Royal Dutch Airlines have also joined this year's search as sponsors.

SGV Foundation chair David L. Balangue said he's again jubilant with "the powerhouse" team on forming entrepreneurship and promoting love of entrepreneurs to take on the marketplace.

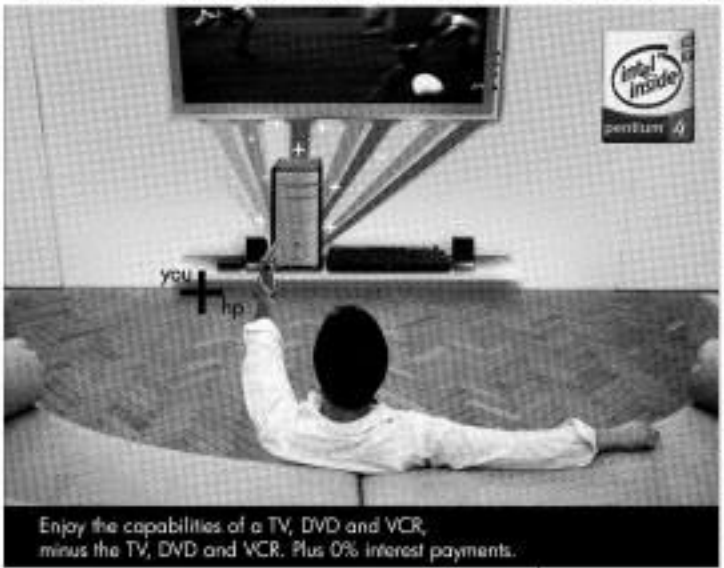
"Through the program, we can show that the Philippines has the talent and capability to compete globally. More importantly, we can counter that Tony Tan Caktiong and Jollibee, which started here is more an exception, will inspire other Filipino entrepreneurs to work harder and be emboldened to be here in challenges and overcome hurdles," Balangue said.

This year, the Entrepreneur Of The Year Philippines 2004 winner will receive the Member Entrepreneur Of The Year Philippines 2004 who will represent the country in the World Entrepreneur Of The Year Awards in Monte Carlo, Monaco, in May 2005.

To qualify, the nominee should be a business owner or founder who is primarily responsible for the growth of his or her company and still active in top management. The business must have been operating for at least two years.

An independent panel of judges composed of leaders from government, business and the academe will evaluate nominees in terms of innovation, financial performance and personal commitment to have business and community.

Nominations end on Oct. 31. Self-nominations are encouraged, so are those from suppliers, customers and others dealing closely with the entrepreneur. For details, contact Lenore Rodolfo G. Reyes, Entrepreneur Of The Year Program Coordinator, at 894-4375 or e-mail lore.lore@pdi.com.com.



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THE DAILY GOSPEL

Saturday, September 18, 2004
Sixth Week in Ordinary Time
1st Reading: 1 Cor 15:35-37, 42-44
Gospel: Lk 8:4-15

At a great crowd gathered and people came to him from every town, Jesus began speaking these through stories, or parables. "The sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some of the grain fell along the way, was trodden on and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and as sooner had it come up than it withered, because it had no moisture. Some fell among thorns; the thorns grew up with the seed and choked it. But some fell on good soil and grew, producing fruit—a hundred times as much." And Jesus cried out, "Listen then, if anyone has ears to hear."

The disciples asked him, "What does this story mean?" And he answered, "To you has been granted to know the mystery of the kingdom of God. But to others it is given in parables, so that, though seeing they may not perceive and hearing they may not understand."

Here is the is the point of the parable:

The seed is the word of God. Those along the way are people who hear it, but immediately the devil comes and takes the word from their minds, for he doesn't want them to believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are people who receive the word with joy but they have no roots; they believe for a while and give way in time of trial. Among the thorns are people who hear the word but as they go their way are choked by life's worries, riches and the pleasures of life; they bring no fruit to maturity. The good soil, however, are people who receive the word and keep it in a noble and generous heart, and persevering patiently, they bear fruit.

Commentary

The soil is the heart of the person who hears the word of God. It can be rocky, caked or cold. Or, it can be moist and fertile. Jesus uses these images to describe the dispositions of his hearers and now the disciples will finally understand what he means.

1. "Some seed fell along the path..." This path is where everyone walks. It's public property and is not cultivated in any way. Likewise, when you are on a path you are between places, you are nowhere. The path has no interest. If it's always on the way to somewhere else, you could say of it, as it were, "I'm nowhere, and the seed of God cannot find a place in me."

2. "Some seed fell on rocky ground..." This hearer can be like a rock in a stone-filled, impossible, uncultivated, rejected, and worthless. "Throughout the ages it has been a common metaphor for the heart. It and becomes the hearer of stony from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezek 11:19).

3. "Some seed fell among thorns..." It has a chance to grow there, but something else is growing there too. Its power is divided into a thousand parts, and only one is available for the seed of God. It's like thinking enough for pages of a magazine: nothing remains in the brain even though everything was processed.

4. "Some seed fell on good soil..." "If a good and sober mind is the object sought for, then this heart is deep and safe and silent. Here I may hear the word of God.

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Vinarao back as prisons head

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo has appointed retired police general Vicente Vinarao as new head of the Bureau of Corrections.

Vinarao replaces Bucor chief Diosdado Santiago.

"He did a good job when he was the one (in charge of that)," Ms Arroyo told Malacañang reporters during lunch at the State Dining Room.

Vinarao served as Bucor chief during the Ramos administration where he also served as

VINARAO

superintendent of the Philippine National Police Academy and presidential adviser for police affairs.

Santiago, former Armed Forces chief of staff, resigned last week. Jaime Laude/Jovelyn Ilana

PNP TOP BRASS

GMA kin, 3 others promoted

By Christian V. Esguerra

A RELATIVE of President Macapagal-Arroyo has been promoted along with three other police generals at the Philippine National Police.

Chief Supt. Oscar Calderon, the PNP's comptroller who is said to be a cousin of the President, was given his second star and promoted to Director as were two other chief superintendents, Arturo Lomibao and Vidal Querol.

Director Ricardo de Leon, the new head of the PNP anti-illegal drugs campaign, was promoted to deputy director general (with three stars).

PNP chief Edgar Aglipay had promised the promotions to De Leon and the three generals who were officially given their new stars at the 115th National Law Enforcement Coordinating Council meeting in Cebu City yesterday.

Calderon, who is the President's balikbayan, had been considered a "dark horse" in the race to succeed Director General Hermogenes Ebdane as PNP chief, which he won to Aglipay.

With a hero's welcoming the top PNP post on Aug. 31, Aglipay announced that he was already working on the promotion of De Leon, Calderon, Lomibao and Querol.

Camp Crame insiders believe De Leon's promotion may have been a way of appeasing him. De Leon held the coveted National Capital Region Police Office post when he was sacked out of the PNP and designated chief of the Philippine Center for Transnational Crime.

Though the PCTC is a powerful government agency, it has lately been seen as dumping ground for police generals who do not find favor with Malacañang or with whoever is the PNP chief.

Apparently to further appease him, De Leon was appointed to concurrently head the PNP's Anti-Illegal Drugs Special Operations Task Force, a post previously held by Aglipay.

Lomibao's promotion is seen as a sop to his bruised ego after his appointment as director of the Calabarzon region, another catch-as-catch-can PNP position, was scrapped.

Lomibao was supposed to have been moved out of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group to Calabarzon, but the incumbent Chief Supt. Reynaldo Varilla allegedly lobbied to be retained in the post.

As a result, Chief Supt. Jesus Verzosa, who was to replace Lomibao as CIDG director, will have to wait indefinitely.

Fil-Am general here for visit, does things the Asian way

U.S. ARMY Lt. Gen. Edward Soriano and Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Gen. Narciso Abaya exercise snappy salutes during the Fil-American general's visit at Camp Aguinaldo. (See A10-A11)

Soriano did not give any comment to reporters and details of his meetings were not released to media.

"It was very informal and I think that is the Asian way of building those ties," Cruz told reporters.

The only other Filipino-American general in the US military is Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba, who recently created international headlines with his report about abuses allegedly committed by US servicemen against Islamic detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

This is Soriano's first visit to his former homeland since his family, from Pangasinan, immigrated to the United States nearly 55 years ago. The general was a 6-year-old boy then.

Soriano's credentials

Aside from leading the I Corps, Soriano is also commander of the Ft. Lewis, Washington, headquarters of the III Army Special Forces unit. He is also Director of Homeland Security, US Joint Forces Command. The September 11 Homeland Security was formed by President George W. Bush to coordinate security measures after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

The US Army's I Corps plays a key role in American defense. US officials have participated in Cobra Gold, the annual Pacific Rim Land Area Network exercises in Thailand.

Cruz also said that Soriano's visit highlighted the possibility of other Filipino rising to the ranks of the US military.

During his visit, Soriano will give a talk to cadets of the Philippine Military Academy.

"General Soriano's accomplishment gives us pride and it gives impetus to our young men and women that they too could rise in the ranks," Cruz said.

Visit to his hometown

Soriano's visit is upon a long-standing invitation extended by Abaya. Aside from visiting the AFP's in Baguio, Soriano is also to visit his relatives in Manila, Pangasinan.

Cruz did not say if Soriano discussed counterterrorism and the country's efforts to fight global terrorism during his talks with Philippine officials.

Besides meetings with defense and military officials and his visit to the Philippine, Soriano will also meet with officials of the GI Bethany and US military personnel temporarily assigned to the Philippines.

A checkered career

According to a statement by the US Embassy, units under Soriano's command have participated in joint RP-US military exercises. "Additionally, in support of security assistance training for the AFP Special Forces personnel from Ft. Lewis also currently conducting light infantry training to enhance the AFP's counterterrorism efforts," the embassy said.

Soriano was commissioned in a second lieutenant of infantry upon graduating from his San Jose State University in 1970 with a management degree. He graduated from the Army War College in 1989.

He has held a number of command positions with airborne, light and mechanized units in the US Army based on the mainland and around the world.

He is married to the former Vilma Guillermo and they have two children.

Army in Germany as part of Operation Joint Endeavor in Bosnia-Herzegovina and commander of the 7th Infantry Division and Fort Carson in Colorado.

Medals won

Among his awards were a Distinguished Service Medal, two Defense Superior Service Medals, three Meritorious Service Medals, the Bronze Star, four decorations of the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Meritorious Service Medal.

He is married to the former Vilma Guillermo and they have two children.

Annan's wrong: Iraq war is legal, says Bush

Bush said Kerry, in a radio interview on Wednesday, had said that "there were no circumstances, none, under which we should have gone to war" even though he voted in October 2002 to authorize the use of force in Iraq.

According to a transcript of the interview, Kerry was asked whether there were any circumstances today that justified the war in Iraq and replied: "Under the current circumstances, no, there are none that I see."

"I would have to disagree on some of those answers," the senator said, quoted reference to the failure to find the vast chemical and biological arms stockpiles Bush warned posed a threat to US security. AFP

Execs . . .

Former Danding lawyer disbarred for immorality

IN THE KNOW

THE SUPREME Court defines immoral conduct as "that conduct which is willful, flagrant or shameless, and which shows a moral indifference to the opinion of the good and respectable members of the community."

It is one of the grounds provided by the Rules of Court which may merit a lawyer's disbarment or suspension from the practice of law.

Disbarment is the ultimate disciplinary remedy against a lawyer. It is imposed for the most serious misconduct and results in the removal of the lawyer's name from the roll of attorneys.

Other grounds for disbarment and suspension against a member of the bar are any deceit, malpractice, or other gross misconduct, grossly immoral conduct, or by reason of his conviction of a crime involving moral turpitude, or for any violation of the lawyer's oath which he is required to take before admission to practice of law, or his willful disobedience of any lawful order of a superior court, or his corruptly or wilfully appearing as an attorney for a party to a case without authority to do so. The practice of soliciting cases at law for the purpose of gain, either personally or through paid agents or brokers, constitutes malpractice.

Any person can file a disbarment, suspension or disciplinary proceeding against a member of the bar before the Supreme Court or the integrated bar of the Philippines. The complaint must only be verified and must state clearly and concisely the facts complained of. It must also be supported by affidavits of persons having personal knowledge of the facts alleged or such other documents or records as may substantiate the facts alleged.

If a complaint is against justices, even if lawyers are merely charged with them, it must be filed with the Supreme Court. If filed before the IBP, the same will still be forwarded to the Supreme Court for disposition.

Proceedings against attorneys are private and confidential. However, the final order of the Supreme Court shall be published like its decisions or other cases.

PDI Research

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Ibanez

44 killed in US air strikes in Fallujah

FALLUJAH, Iraq—At least 44 people were killed Friday as US forces continued their relentless strikes against targets allegedly connected to al-Qaida-linked extremist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi near Fallujah, an official resident said, adding that many of the victims were women and children.

Several air raids were carried out after midnight, hitting the village of Zoba, some 16 km south of the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah, and demolishing 13 houses, the sources said.

The final death toll was 44 dead and 27 injured, the Iraqi health ministry said.

Hashim al-Fallujah doctor, Ahmed Rakhid, told AFP bodies were brought from Zoba to Fallujah general hospital as well as 40 wounded. He said many of the victims were women and children.

The doctor also said two women were killed and eight people wounded in another raid on Jolaybeh Shihabi's neighborhood, which has been repeatedly targeted by the US-led coalition.

Witnesses said several people were still trapped in the ruins of the destroyed houses in Zoba.

"With the authorization of Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, Multi-National Force-Iraq sustained a precision strike and destroyed a terrorist compound known to be used by the Abu Musab Al Zarqawi terrorist cell for the planning of activity subversive to the Iraqi government and its people," a US military statement said.

"The terrorists targeted in this strike were believed to be associated with recent bombing attacks and other terrorist activities throughout Iraq that have resulted in the deaths of numerous Iraqi citizens," it said.

The military later said it killed 60 insurgent fighters in what it described as a strike that leveled a three-building compound on the outskirts of Fallujah.

The military claimed up to 90 foreign fighters had gathered inside the compound to plot attacks against US and Iraqi forces when the coalition forces attacked.

The claim could not be verified and it was not clear whether the death toll reported by the Fallujah hospital included any of the foreign fighters.

Prime US Marines died Thursday in Al Anbar province, which includes Fallujah and Ramadi, but the location was not specified. The killings were not linked to the late night strikes.

Fallujah general hospital, which has been flooded with casualties because of the repeated strikes in recent days, was filled with chaotic scenes early Friday as relatives brought their own wounded in and ambulances arrived.

On Monday, US strikes in the area killed 15 people and wounded scores.

When killed in combat, foreign fighters are not always brought to government hospitals and morgues and often remain unaccounted for.

The US military said the strikes were conducted at 9:45 p.m., adding that the foreign fighters were marked behind a village, forcing the army to "disassemble the engagement of those terrorists in order to protect the civilian populace." AFP

Bush, Kerry in tight race, fresh polls indicate

BUSH

KERRY

POLL DIGEST—Fresh polls show the bitter and volatile presidential race between George W. Bush and John Kerry both to a dead heat as the two candidates stepped up their use of attack ads this...

Surveys released Thursday by the Pew Research Center and Fannie Mae each had Kerry edging out a solid lead. Bush forged with a month of attacks on his Democratic rival capped by the Republican national convention.

The Pew data showed the Massachusetts senator closing his way back from a 12-point deficit among registered voters interviewed between Sept. 8 and 10 to a 46-46 percent tie last days later.

A Harris poll of likely voters published in the Wall Street Journal had Kerry up 48-47 percent. The twin findings were in conduct contrast to previous surveys that showed Bush opening up a margin of two to 12 points.

But although Bush's post-convention "bounce" appeared to be subsiding less than seven weeks before the Nov. 2 election, the latest numbers still had senior survey...ing news for Kerry.

Bush held a double-digit lead on his capacity to manage the Iraq crisis and led nearly two-to-one on combating terrorism, Pew said. If Kerry regained a six-point lead on the economy, it was still down from a 13-point margin in August.

The Pew poll also confirmed Bush's backing was soft. Sixty-one percent of those backing the Democrat said they were firmly...ers, up from 44 percent in August. Even Democrats were positively pro-Bush...

Sixty percent of voters regarded Bush in with a second four-year term, up from 44 percent in August. Even Democrats were positive about Kerry's chances. One number preferring victory for him dropped from 60 to 51 percent.

Fear and the pool of uncertain voters had increased from 21 to 25 percent since June and suggested the presidential debates expected to begin in two weeks could be crucial with 64 percent of voters planning to tune in.

While Kerry and the Democrats have vowed to refocus their campaign on the lackluster US economy, Iraq again dominated the debate Thursday amid continuing turmoil and new criticism from the United Nations.

Bush, campaigning in Minnesota state, defended the March 2003 invasion which UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called illegal, and accused Kerry of sending dangerous "mixed signals" on the operation.

The president did not directly address Annan's remarks but referred to the UN Security Council resolution in November 2002 warning of "serious consequences" if Iraq did not account for its weapons of mass destruction.

"I believe when leaders say something, they better mean it," Bush said, making no mention of his failure to win UN Security Council support for a second resolution explicitly authorizing the use of force.

The Republican also reiterated he would have invaded Iraq even if he knew no unconventional weapons would be found, and he assailed Kerry as a waffler who first voted to authorize the use of force in Iraq and then opposed the war.

"Mixed signals are the wrong signals to send to our troops in the field, the Iraqi people, to our allies and most of all to our enemies," Bush told a rally.

"It is critical that the president of the United States speak clearly and consistently in this time of great threat in the world and not change positions because of expediency or pressure." AFP

Envoys taken to site of Nokor mystery blast

SEOUL—Foreign diplomats taken to the apparent scene of a mystery explosion in North Korea were shown a large building site and told vast blasts occurred, but South Korea Friday cast doubt on Pyongyang's explanation.

Suspicions were aroused that a nuclear test could have taken place after South Korea reported last week a massive earthquake-like shock was linked up in an area known to contain storage sites for missiles and explosives.

To prove this was not the case, North Korea took a group of foreign diplomats to what it said was the site of the explosion in rugged Hamkyongpuk county Thursday.

"They were in a huge building site," said a German diplomat in Pyongyang, who was briefed by German Ambassador to North Korea Hans-Georg Adam, who visited the area.

"North Korea explained that there had been two large explosions, one on Wednesday and one on Thursday last week," he said.

The North said they were controlled explosions to remove a mountain in preparation for construction of a hydro-electric power project.

The diplomat confirmed they had been shown a hydro-electric plant but was unable to confirm evidence of explosions.

"It's very hard to tell," he said.

"The ambassador is not a technical expert so we were not able to examine what we have been told and what we have seen." South Korea now says it believes no such explosion took place at the site.

It said the diplomats were taken to an area some 60 km east of where the supposed blasts were recorded... an area where Pyongyang has previously said it was building a waterway.

"We suspect there was no blast at all at the site where intelligence authorities originally thought there were indications of a blast," Vice Unification Minister Lee Bong-ji told reporters in Seoul.

He said that no earth tremor was recorded on the day of the suspected explosion, but it was found to have originated near Mountain Baldub on the border with China, some 300 km from Hamkyongpuk county and not where the diplomats were. AFP

Prince Harry wants to carry on Diana's work

LONDON—Prince Harry, who turned 20 this week, says in a documentary about his gap year in Lesotho that he wants to carry on the humanitarian work of his mother, the late Princess Diana.

"The Forgotten Kingdom: Prince Harry in Lesotho," to be broadcast Sunday on Britain's main commercial ITV channel, features his first-ever on-camera interview. Excerpts were released for publication Thursday.

Harry vowed to carry on the legacy of his mother, who was killed in August 1997, a year after her divorce from Prince Charles, heir to the British throne.

"I believe I've got a lot of my mother in me, hopefully, and I think she'd want us to do this, me and my brother" Prince William, he said, who is due to visit with HIV orphans in Lesotho.

Harry, who is hoping to attend Britain's elite Sandhurst military college, spent eight weeks in the southern African country earlier this year during his gap year, or year off, deciding many of his image as a playboy party animal.

The documentary shows him playing with AIDS orphans and making friends with a 4-year-old boy, Wesley Rosana, at the Mamre-ine Children's Home in Mohale's Hoek.

"He was just a really special kid ... He clicks, no cuddles, really sweet, a little devil sometimes, but really, really good fun," said Harry.

Although he has not been tested, Wesley is believed to have either the HIV virus or full-blown AIDS and is unlikely to live past the age of 10. Both Wesley's parents have died of the illness.

Harry was also filmed cuddling a 16-month-old girl named Libelon, in a comic reminiscent of Diana's humanitarian mission to another African nation, Angola, shortly before her death. AFP

CHECHEN warlord Shamil Basayev

Chechen owns school hostage-taking

MOSCOW—Warlord Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev purportedly took responsibility for a recent series of terrorist attacks in Russia but put ultimate blame for a school massacre on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A long letter e-mail attributed to Basayev and posted Friday on the Kavkaz Center website said he had sent a letter to Putin proposing "independent (for Chechnya) mediation for security." It was impossible to confirm whether the one signed by Basayev's nom de guerre, "Abdallah Shamil, head of the Riyadus Salikhin Martyrs' Brigade," — on the website was genuine. But the site is considered a mouthpiece for Basayev and his previous claims of responsibility have appeared there.

The letter to Putin said that if Russia withdrew its troops and recognized Chechen independence, Chechnya would neither support nor finance groups fighting Russia, and "we see guarantees that all of Russia's Muslim world refrain from armed methods of struggle against the Russian Federation, at least for 15-15 years, on condition that freedom of religion (as is guaranteed in the Russian Federation) be respected."

The letter said Chechnya would join the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose federation of former Soviet republics.

The e-mail said Basayev's brigade was responsible for an August explosion at a bus stop outside Moscow, the near-simultaneous bombings of two planes the same night, a suicide bombing outside a Moscow subway station a week later, and the school hostage-taking in Beslan that ended in a hail of gunfire and explosions.

More than 400 people were killed in the attacks, with some 330 of those deaths coming during the hostage crisis in the Beslan school.

"A terrible tragedy occurred in the city of Beslan: the Kremlin vampire drew up and wounded 1,000 children and adults, giving the underway in storm the school for the sake of imperial ambitions and the preservation of his own throne," the e-mail attributed to Basayev said.

Putin and other officials and repeatedly that in order to arrest a bloodbath, they had not planned to storm the school, where the attackers had ripped bombs and wanting the approximately 1,200 hostages. Yesterday in Russian officials and witnesses, after explosions rocked the school, and armed volunteers started shooting, the special forces opened fire, too.

But a few road disputed that.

"We declare that the Russian special services stormed the school, [and that] it was planned from the very beginning," it said.

It alleged that Emergency Situations Ministry workers who entered he ordered to purposefully collect bodies of hostages who had been killed early in the crisis were actually security services officers, and that the explosion rang out only after those workers had rolled "bait-out" to the hostages.

The attackers' demands had been clear: an immediate stop to the war in Chechnya and a start to the withdrawal of Russian troops, an Putin's resignation if he "does not want peace," the letter said, if the president would devote an end to fighting, the return of troops to their barracks and a troop withdrawal, it said...the attackers promised they would "forget that the hostages exist. And if the troops were really being withdrawn, they would have given their final.

"As soon as the troops are withdrawn from the mountains, we will let children up to age 12 go, the one after the full troop withdrawal, by end of the remainders would go.

If Putin had complied, the attackers would have freed all the children and left for Chechnya with the remainder of the hostages, the e-mail said.

Putin has firmly ruled out any negotiations with Chechen rebels, insisting that the war battered region is returning to normalcy under the Kremlin's rule. progenies of inviting increasing authority to elected Chechen officials and has embarked more services and reconstruction. AP

WORLDBRIEFS

'Ivan' kills 14 in US

GULF SHORES, Alabama — Hurricane Ivan killed at least 14 people in the southern United States, with three states declared official disaster areas and three cities under dusk-to-dawn curfews. The Florida city of Pensacola, which suffered some of the worst damage from Ivan after it struck Wednesday night, is subject to a list of several localities in the southern part of the state that were devastated in the past six weeks by hurricanes Charley and Frances. With the hurricane season in full swing and extremely active, Americans were now keeping an anxious watch over Hurricane Jeanne as it battered Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, possibly on its way to the US coast. Authorities on Thursday ordered dusk-to-dawn curfews in Pensacola and in the Alabama cities of Gulf Shores, where the storm hit the coast, and Mobile. The measures were to remain in force and keep emergency teams on duty. AFP

Annan urges Darfur action

UNITED NATIONS — Secretary General Kofi Annan on Thursday called on the UN Security Council to take urgent action over a US draft resolution on Sudan's troubled Darfur region. "I have urged the Security Council to act on the draft resolution without delay, and to be as united as possible," he told reporters. "It seems to me inconceivable that it should fail to respond." China has threatened to veto the measure, and Ambassador Wang Guangya said earlier that Beijing still had problems with the draft, which is aimed at pressing Sudan to rein in the Arab militias behind the Darfur bloodshed. The resolution hangs the threat of sanctions against Sudan's oil industry if Khartoum does not end the violence which has left an estimated 50,000 people dead and displaced 1.4 million more. AFP

Iran nuclear program

VIENNA — The United States and Europe's three main states reached agreement Thursday in Vienna on a UN draft resolution on Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, a US official said. The consultation team set up on Oct. 31 ultimatum for Iran to comply with demands from the UN watchdog watching, according to a copy of the text obtained by AFP. A US State Department official told AFP the text had been approved by President George W. Bush's top non-proliferation official, Undersecretary of State John Bolton, but still had to be approved by Secretary of State Colin Powell. It also must be approved by the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) 35-nation board of governors, meeting this week in Vienna. Many members of the board, including most signed statutes, had been hostile to the US insistence on an ultimatum. The United States, which charges that Iran is secretly developing nuclear weapons, would like to see the IAEA board declare Iran in non-compliance with nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) safeguards and take Tehran before the UN Security Council for possible sanctions. AFP

Huge strike hits S. Africa

PRETORIA — Hundreds of thousands of teachers, nurses, police and other public sector employees walked off the job across South Africa on Thursday in demand better wages in one of the biggest strikes since the end of apartheid a decade ago. Eight unions representing close to one million employees launched the action, with the day of the strike and told the government to come up with a better salary offer in 48 hours or face some wave of protest action on Monday and Tuesday. "Negotiations have reached a dead end ... the public service is heading for a crisis," said Fikile Mbalula, the general secretary of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union, at the main protest march in Pretoria. The country's largest labor federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), said about 700,000 workers, including 300,000 teachers, stayed away from work but the government said about 250,000 public sector workers took part in the strike. Government negotiator Kenny Creecraft told AFP that initial figures showed the situation on the ground was more affected with 440,000—half of all teachers—observing shelfs. "But there was no real impact in the essential services sector," Creecraft said. AFP

Deadly mystery bird ailment

ATHENS — Wildlife experts are baffled by the deaths of thousands of birds at a lake in northern Greece, a spokesperson for the Greek Ornithological Society said. At least 4,000 birds are known to have died at Lake Kerkini, a nature site supposedly protected from industrial pollution. An unknown disease is just over a week, and the toll could rise to 12,000 or more, Kimberlee Kappas said. AFP

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

OPINION

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ARRGGHH!
SEX
Violence
PASS
PASS
PASS

View from the other side

POLITICAL TIDBITS
Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

AT THE RECENT independence anniversary of the Central American countries, namely Mexico, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Panama and Honduras, I spent some time talking to some foreign executives and diplomats. I understood the opportunities that exist in the region, but since I left Congress, I'm probably true of many of us Filipinos who are wrapped up in our own problems; we have more the perspective from the other side.

I'm sure Speaker Jose de Venecia will be in the business of assuring foreign investors the political and economic stability environment. He told the participants abroad to bet on Congress to literally ratify presidents time-tabling all party issues, such as charter change, the VAT, the OCW issue, which may mean urgent thing to do is to address the budget deficit and how to raise revenues. This has raised the question of just how serious the government is in addressing the budget deficit problem. The question, in turn, has caused prospective foreign investors to adopt a wait-and-see attitude.

This source stressed that the executive and the legislature have to work together to prevent a "real fiscal crisis" which could develop in the next few months, by incorporating the following: The "automatic" oil price adjustment. Stressing that Congress has to pass those revenue measures, this analyst countered why President Macapagal-Arroyo has not taken advantage of the super majority in the House to effect this. I pointed out that the Senate opposite to the stumbling block, but this source opined that the House ought to just pass the revenue measures and then toss them to the Senate, and "let the people judge."

* * *

One diplomat wondered why there is all the fuss about the pork barrel reduction when it won't really reduce the budget, since that P60 billion budget for 2005 already runs it by 40 percent. The war is still there, he noted. I opined that the abolition of the lump sum pork barrel is primarily political, in order to level the playing field for all candidates, and to promote a measure of more transparency and fairness to politics, and in turn, this would make it easier for people to accept new taxes.

* * *

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* * *

Another foreigner opined that this long social "honeymoon" can be over-stretched, the business, he added, will make a show of having purchases blocked and long-term decisions will be "down-zone" because the clime and elsewhere already bought! So, what to say here?

* * *

More and more people, it seems, sense that all Congress has done recently is debate various issues, when it should be passing the corrective measures, as the GF administration have proposed. It doesn't help to keep assigning blame, as the executive is set doing. Even the President is admit to her "mistakes" on various issues such as the DOTC's omnibus or the Superoxide debt, but if you come right down to it, blame-making is beyond rational.

* * *

This is the DOTC case. You, there are more where DOTC's have been facing issues which deal with the country's economic survival. Take the case of Mabuhay Miles failed to win them in even after it turned Mr.Immediate 20 in June 2003, which pegged "official" salaries at no higher than P100,000 a month. Then today, Undersecretary Arthur Espiritu said after the Palace ratified that there were legal issues that needed to be addressed first, such as the DOTC charter. Congress also ought to check the limits of the power to regulate those charters that are "affected with the public interest." As always, the issue is oddly with politics.

* * *

As I said earlier, the public badly needs political attention to the many pressing issues, but the doctors are still debating which — blame for the mess on. Let's settle the matter first.

* * *

My Mass against the dreadful conditions of the toilet room at Naia 1 drew no invitation to the airport jails' airport problems from Atlantic Gist, Naia 1 general manager and head of the Manila International Airport Authority. It was arranged by Ismelda Bunker, a private practitioner at the Ninoy International relief and have government employees counsel, who had worked with Cuel in the Philippine Ports Authority that the latter headed prior to his new airport job. Cuel previously said that the Nia Angeles has been pressing him about the problems of unkempt airport toilets since he joined Naia last June; (I said his attention are really more attractive to the presidential. He said such a thing that his wife was quite apprehensive about his accepting the high-profile and problem-plagued airport job. He said that a modest toilet is being constructed and promised to invite me to see it.

I'm glad Cuel recognizes the importance of small details like this and that it's now being addressed without spending too much money.

* * *

Cuel, a Cebuano who was with Asean Shipping for 31 years before he put up his own shipping company prior to his appointment to the airports, is being credited with the successful bidding and implementation of GMA's "nautical highway," using ports one of the best-working projects of the administration, the earlier worked with GMA on the Philippine Ports Authority.

* * *

Cuel gave me an insight into GMA's plans for the country's airports. I've known DO for placed Clark Airport into the other international airports such as Cebu, Cebu, Davao, Zamboanga City, Cagayan de Oro, Iloilo and Puerto Princesa. Interestingly, Cuel's job even bigger. He said GMA wants to develop Cebu at the rate of almost 10 billion and turn it into "another Cebu." This is to counteract it into a regional center for Asia, where things will land for transshipment to other points in the region. In the meantime, only low-cost flights have flown; but the new plans, which will be facilitated by the upgrading of Nia 1, will be followed by such job development, starting with the construction of a spanking new passenger terminal.

(More on this later.)

Life after dance

AT LARGE
Rina Jimenez-David

I RECITE the concluding portion of excerpts from Edna Vida Ayson-Poblete's account of "My Life at my Mainland," written for her recognition as an "Amazing Woman" during the most-talented International Women Alumni Homecoming. As a student, Valdez was just an amazing Bicolandia, she's an amazing artist, writer, wife and mother as well.

* * *

NORMA Makaraya was a Russian prima ballerina who was the star of the American Ballet Theatre in New York. She was invited to perform with Ballet Philippines in "Giselle," a role in which she was acclaimed worldwide. The new important role, after Giselle and the mad, loved Albrecht, was Myrtha, the Queen of the Wilis, or ghosts of maidens who were betrayed by their lovers. The ballerina who was to play Myrtha was vacationing in Germany, timed I had the lengths and the jumps (Myrtha's role) to balance Giselle's. Norma had to take a crash course of the ballet dance steps to be her understudy.

When [the original Myrtha] arrived every-one was horrified... [she] had gained weight and was completely out of shape. After a series of rehearsals, the artistic staff decided I was going to do it.

As soon as Makarova stepped out of the plane, her first question was, "Who is doing Myrtha?" When told that it was me, she said she was critically ill. I gathered, wobbled and tumbled. I felt that was it. She would never agree to dance with a crippled amateur. But the ballet-conscious Russian ballerina is a true-blue Tsarist loyalist.

Soon after "Giselle," a Swiss ballet master told me he was considering me for the role of "Firebird" with Geneva. He wasn't sure if he should invite me to audition. He said he had one year to prepare and it was the most active, wrenching role. I wanted the role so badly. I had visual-ing nightmares about my rival.

Before opening night, I was petrified and imagining if suddenly I wasn't as much fun breathe. By the time the curtain was fast the Russian ballerina topping Firebird couldn't budge an inch. The rehearsal was called on a halt and an impromptu-ceremony was held. I was told I could sit instead of stand. Not-small-help. Admirer have-to warm up before entering the stage. As soon as I landed, I had to dance an intricate solo followed by a pas de deux for 45 minutes nonstop. Jimmy and I had no alternates. We performed "Firebird" for 10 nights in a row. I was overjoyed when to-message my fan [one as I could complete the performance, after that I was very careful of landing intricate for anything ever again.

* * *

MITSUHIDE years behind as-a-result couple, a non-date to get-married. Since my parents were against my marrying a dancer — because he has to wear a tig-ster... or lead to make-up-in-his-own-room-mommies, they-are-wedding night. Mitsuhide and-united-all-to-rehearsals. Each-was-on-life in-the-performing-arts. A-wedding night was just one of those things.

* * *

When-we-first-child, Mitsuhi, was-born, I-were-at-home. At-that-time-this-had-moved-to-San Francisco and-landed-an-assistant-director-to-run-the-company-in-Manila. I-just-I-was-cut-out-for-the-position since I-was-too-dancing. What-interested-me-was-choreography. Mitsuhide-had-choreographed-in-the-company. Bill, and-ballet-dancer. Having-the-company's-premiere-dancer-and-rehearsal-master, James-our-professional-manager-and-up-and-coming-Chinese-dancer-who-became-my-secretary-I-was-under-their-during-my-entire-dancing-career. The-reasons-I-learned-I-continue-to-have-leading-career-managers-and-artistes-to-this-day.

By-then-I-was-dancing, teaching-and-choreographing-my-own-but-might-hardly. But-I-I-every-had-down-on-my-profile-every-day, ac-commodation, dancers, teachers, choreographers. I-have-I-loved-seeing-the-last-but-the-dishes-I-have-died-our-car-in-head-for-home. But-even-when-I-had-to-put-on-a-wife's-hat...

* * *

After-our-second-child, Rafael, was-born, I-just-had-to-move-on. It-disturbed-me-that-in-monitoring-his-dancers-I-orphaned-my-own-children-with-him-during-the-final-curtain-calls. We-did-practice-for-the-children's-recital-and-made-arrangements-for-the-children's-recital-but-couldn't-just-be-there-for-them. Mitsuhide-had-his-dancers-but-I-couldn't-just-be-there-for-them. Mitsuhide-had-his-dancers-but-I-couldn't-just-be-there-for-them.

AFTER ANOTHER three years in the Iwon Iwon, Nancy-as-last-bid-dancing-farewell. The-audiences-who-adored-him-were-distraught. His-co-partners-from-all-over-the-world-came-to-dance-with-him-during-the-final-curtain-calls. We-did-practice-for-the-children's-recital-and-made-arrangements-for-the-children's-recital-but-couldn't-just-be-there-for-them. Mitsuhide-had-his-dancers-but-I-couldn't-just-be-there-for-them.

After-the-curtain-of-his-"Firebird"-at-the-CCP-we-sat-in-our-dressing-room-and-asked-each-other-what-now? Okay. I'm going to-write. That-was-income. And-so-I-became-a-writer. I-returned-to-my-first-love, writing. I-wrote-a-column-for-The-Manila-Times-I-wrote-for-magazines-I-wrote-what-I-wrote-for-the-arts-in-this-the-Philippines-my-inheritance-enabled-us-to-buy-a-car-es-and-computer-equipment. Dabbling-with-video-documentaries. Nancy-was-first-prize-in-a-CCP-film-competition. Now-he-has-his-own-video-business. — his-life-after-dance.

My-sisters-and-I-often-tease-over-our-days-in-sisterhood. But-parents-had-been-ordained-but-somehow-gave-us-the-impression-that-we-were-princesses-of-sisterhood-and-because-he-their-only-sons, we-thank-them-profusely-for-their-great-sacrifice. Until-now, I-think-the-most-memorable-occasion-to-express-my-pride-in-the-Macapagal-Arroyo-I-would-invite-her-subjects-to-march-in-those-objective-with-on-the-discipline, principles-and-moral-values-that-I-learned-from-school. I-think-all-Marylouvites-are-amazing-because-Marylouvil-is-an-amazing-school.

16th and 17th century urbanism

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY
Randel L. Harper

"The optimum-end of a moral society is the kind of law-blind it believes-in-children."

—Howard Rushmore-theologian (1906-1962)
(The good-man-coming-to-work-gets-the-following article. (Just-thought-I'd-let-you-know-morning.)

THE CAPITAL of the Philippines, struggle and survive-many-natural-and-man-made-disasters, experienced-various-changes-in-its-physical-form during-the-16th-and-17th-centuries. No doubt-the-five-years' conversations-contained-mainly-of-topic-lists-and-it-may-have-looked-more-like-a-village-than-a-city-in-the-16th-century. Due-to-dangers-from-fire-and-typhoons, there-was-a-move-to-shift-to-a-sturdier-material. With-time, the city-began-to-regain-a-distinct-aspect.

During-the-administration-of-Governor-de-Sande, the-construction-of-buildings-of-stone-started. This-continued-during-the-administrations-of-Governor-Santiago-Diaz-and-Francisco-Tello.

The-prosperity-of-the-inhabitants-brought-on-by-the-Galleon-Trade-was-reflected-in-the-appearance-of-the-city-toward-the-end-of-the-16th-century. Unfortunately-the-earthquakes-during-the-17th-century-forced-a-return-to-wooden-construction. Many-ruined-stone-structures-were-converted-rendering-a-lamentable-appearance-to-the-city.

One-of-the-strangest-things-the-Spanish-did-was-to-model-the-Parian-with-houses-and-streets-of-the-Chinese-just-beside-the-city. Parian-to-become-the-commercial-center-of-the-Chinese-in-one-of-the-reasons-for-the-massive-residences-of-Chinese-to-Manila-and-the-considerable-increase-of-commerce-and-trade.

In-1583, disaster-occurred-a-devastating-fire-that-started-in-the-monastery-of-San-Agustin-during-the-funeral-of-D.-Gonzalo-Ronquillo. The-fire-reduced-the-city-to-ashes. As-a-result, the-acting-governor, Diego-Ronquillo, ordered-that-new-houses-had-to-be-made-of-stone.

Also-in-1583, the-Augustinians-moved-to-their-new-location-in-the-monastery-of-San-Agustin-in-Intramuros-(Spanish-for-"within-the-walls"). The-Augustinians-were-the-first-religious-order-to-arrive-in-the-Philippines-in-1565. They-were-followed-by-the-Franciscans-in-1577, the-Jesuits-in-1581, the-Dominicans-in-1587, the-Recollects-in-1606, the-Augustinian-Recollects-in-1621, the-Hospitallers-of-St.-John-of-God-in-1647, the-Benedictines-in-1704, the-Capuchins-in-1709, the-Poor-Clares-in-1712, the-Carmelites-in-1719, the-Vincentians-in-1862, the-Redemptorists-in-1895, the-Divine-Word-Missionaries-in-1909, the-Columbans-in-1918, the-Maryknoll-Missionaries-in-1926, the-Society-of-the-Divine-Savior-in-1935, the-Missionaries-of-the-Holy-Apostles-in-1946, the-Missionaries-of-the-Sacred-Heart-in-1948, the-Missionaries-of-the-Precious-Blood-in-1949, the-Missionaries-of-the-Holy-Spirit-in-1949, the-Missionaries-of-the-Immaculate-Heart-of-Mary-in-1949, the-Missionaries-of-the-Holy-Family-in-1949, the-Missionaries-of-the-Holy-Spirit-in-1949, the-Missionaries-of-the-Holy-Spirit-in-1949, the-Missionaries-of-the-Holy-Spirit

Extravagance in time of crisis is a crime

If losing candidates are barred from occupying appointive government posts within one year after election, like give discretion that no appointive government officials should be allowed to seek elective position unless they resign one year before the election.

Rationale? These officials should not their time and energy government resources allowed to their offices as we the less sure...

...ence of the majority, not the interests of their proponents leaders and supporters.

Example: Many government officials are kept busy with their todos TV programs, and newspaper columns, which are meant to promote themselves, not to make them better in performing their assigned tasks.

In other words, appointive officials are just being used as campaigning women to endear political ambitions. Worse, many used people's money to fill up their campaign chest.

There ought to be a law!

By the way, with this country admittedly being in crisis, the President should direct her time to enforce Art. 261 of the Civil Code: "Throughout election period no expenses for pleasure or display during a period of state of public woe or emergency may be charged by order of the courts...

LETTERS

...as the issuance of any government or private charitable institution."

—EFREN N. BELTRAN,
Mary Ann Compound,
Bataan na Lupa, Lipa City

Messing up sexuality and motherhood

SUICIDE. David, Macalalad's commentary (FEI, 8/30/04) ignored. Fr. Rabbi Timoteo) statement that there are two moral positions in the Roman Catholic Church: as far as responsible parenthood is concerned the official papal position and the non-official...

...responsible, discerning couples of conscience and those who [illegible] position is not infallible because it is not dogma.

When I say fish or meat in the market, I factor into the weighing scales of the different vendors (sic) as accuracy. What one vendor claims is one kilo may actually be only 800 grams, while the other vendor weighing scales could also give me different weights. But I know that there is an official weighing scale that gives the correct weight of one pure kilo.

The different beliefs and opinions inside the Church are like the market vendors' weighing scales. When it comes to birth and morals, the position of the head of the Church, the Pope, is the official weighing scale. The individual conscience is an appreciation of morals in the truth, and it has to be adjusted accordingly as manifested ("Thou art Peter and upon this rock I build my Church") by the unchanging truth of magisterium of the Church.

On the other hand, in case of dominant, isn't it that whatever we espouse (whether from motherhood) we do get stressful?

—LEILA B. DE LIMA,
Holy Mother of Good Counsel Parish,
Mayorville Quezon Village,
Pandacan (R)

Where that pork goes

CURIOSITY is the belief of many people that the Priority Development Assistance Fund, popularly known as the pork barrel, is directly released to the congressmen and senators, who have a duty do not even get to see or touch the money.

The legislators' PDAF allocations are only assigned to them, but it is the Department of Budget and Management that releases...based on the approved guidelines for implementation formulated by the same offices...after funds directly to the national agencies charged with the implementation of projects.

For instance, a congressman only identifies the various projects prioritized in consultation with the local officials and constituents in his district, then sends to the DBM a list of these projects with a letter requesting the approval and release of funds for their implementation.

When the projects are ready for implementation, the DBM notifies the agencies concerned through a Special Allotment Release Order (SARO). Infrastructure projects such as rehabilitation of roads, school buildings, farm-to-market roads, etc. are built through the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), while medical assistance for indigent patients are released directly to the different hospitals such as the Philippine General Hospital, Philippine Heart Center, etc., and the scholarship funds to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples.

—LEETA BELACAN,
Iwinas-NCIP,
Office of Sen. Josephine Bonsagayan,
(1/F Congress)

Alienated rulers, deluded subjects

EDSON as Randy David for presenting a clear picture of our country's present situation. The "alienated rulers" and "deluded subjects" and "Filipino's mess" (FEI, 9/5/04) gave a clear description of President Macapagal-Arroyo's subconscious, while Randy David's "feeling sick today" (FEI, 8/31/04) clearly explained how the lack of empathy among our leaders today has brought about the failure of the state.

Likewise, the "Talk of the Town" feature on the SP economists' crisis report reflects a lack of vision among our country's elite. But this is always been our problem, only the strong and well-placed get to be heard. The solution is not problems must now be close to everyone. But where to do today ignores it because of their jobs with their families. They really should stop denying their core mandates. Our legislators' excuses for holding on to their pork barrel is lame.

And the country? We should all demand our money complete. As David implied, there must something to do with why our leaders tend to delude us.

—BENEDICT R. BALTAZAR,
Las Piñas City
[redacted]@[redacted].com

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(Maximum of 160 characters)

Across the NATION

10,000 demand peace in Quezon towns

Townsfolk ask communist rebels, gov't soldiers to leave their communities

INFANTA, Quezon—At least 10,000 residents of two northern towns of Quezon took to the streets to demand that their towns be left alone and to press for communist guerrillas and government soldiers who had turned their communities into battlefields.

The residents of Infanta and General Nakar towns sang songs, recited prayers loudly and marched under the heat of the sun Thursday while they asked the Maoist New People's Army and the Armed Forces of the Philippines to leave their communities in peace.

The residents took to the streets following a spate of five killings in Infanta in the past two months. The killings, the residents said, were brought about by the war between the guerrillas and the soldiers.

"Our noise declares our resolve as a zone of peace. Residents and developments. We were sick whenever it is responsible for the recent reports of violence to suspect it for the sake of the people," letter to Major Gram Antonio said.

Dan Cuesta, a city health from the Parliament of Infanta and one of the organizers of the activity, explained that their action is "non-partisan."

"We strongly denounce violence whoever is the perpetrator," he said.

Gathering

At around 8 a.m., some 8,000 residents of Infanta, composed of high school and college students, local government and barangay officials, members of religious, civic groups, non-government organizations and concerned citizens, marched for peace around the poblacion.

All the placards and streamers, some only barely with ideological slants, were all but expressions of deeply mounting power to prevail in the area.

During the same time in neighboring General Nakar town, at least 2,000 residents assembled in the town's central basketball court and held a program punctuated with prayers for peace and musical singing of native patriotic songs.

Nearly armed policemen secured the mass mobilizations in the two towns.

"We, townparents are now afraid to go out of their house when it's already dark. There's an unmistakable sign of terror here," General Nakar Mayor Hernando Arellano, the mobilize Inquirer.

Myra Indiza, faculty member at the Northern Quezon Corporative College in Infanta, brought along her seven-year-old son Joshua to the march rally.

"I want my children to learn the value of fighting for what is right, to stop these senseless violence around us," she said.

Victim

According to Indiza, her husband Nicanor Tena, a Barrio Maya councilman, was gunned down on Sept. 7 by a group of heavily armed men.

Tena died on the spot. Antonio Fabros, a member of "Pamana sa Bayan," a cooperative cultural group in Southern Tagalog, was also killed by unidentified gunmen fatally hitting him in the head.

Tena's wife, Amarah, said they were watching television when the killers fired at her husband using a gun attached with a silencer. The couple was married only three months ago.

After holding their respective programs, a delegation from the two groups met in the middle of Agos Bridge that separates the towns for the signing of a statement declaration of peace and solidarity.

Ironically, at least two military trucks helped transport the demonstrators from Infanta, some five kilometers away from the bridge. —Delfin Mallari Jr., PDI Inquirer Luzon Bureau

Davao execs oppose plan to hold new military exercises in city

DAVAO CITY—City officials expressed their opposition to the proposed conduct of the joint RP-US military exercises here stating "it would only invite trouble."

Earlier, Mayor Rodrigo Duterte showed hostility toward the plan, which Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Zosimo Jesus Paredes Jr. had announced last week.

Paredes, also executive director of the Presidential Commission on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), told reporters here that the RP-US Mutual Defense Board (MDB) has been considering a series of meeting to decide on the next year's Balikatan and Davao City is being considered as one of the venues.

The other areas are General Santos, where the United States funded the construction of several projects including an international airport, and Zamboanga.

Reminded of last February's over-2,000 members manned the building of the Balikatan exercises in Mindanao to make the long-running guerrilla war on the island, and to know more about the jungle experience of Filipino troops here.

"Since 1969, we've been fighting the Communists here, we have a long experience in jungle survival, which might help them (US) in the fight against terror," he said.

Next year's war games would involve at least 2,000 US soldiers and an equal number of their Filipino counterparts.

"I will not let him in his words," Paredes said. Duterte said that the MDB would meet in Hawaii this month to finalize the sites of the exercises.

He said the Balikatan training will help boost the "inter-operability" of both US and Philippine troops, which means that given their software and hardware capability, they can easily link up in times of need.

Paredes said aside from enhancing the skills of Filipino soldiers, the joint military exercises also boost the equipment and war technology of the Philippine military.

He said other such exercise, US forces leave behind millions of equipment.

But Duterte told reporters that, "There is really no purpose for it here . . . It has absolutely no direct benefit to the people of Davao City . . . You will just invite trouble."

In opposing the conduct of the war games here, the city council said the scope of the military exercises does not address the more comprehensive security concerns of the city.

The resolution added that the city does not, at all, consider the military exercises considering its entire peace and order situation.

"Davao City has developed through the years enough through its own initiatives and resources . ," the resolution said. —Arlie Figura, Carmelito Lauerta and Anthony Alcala, Mindanao Bureau

It's 4,000 percent bike in court fees

BAGUIO CITY—Contending political rallies converged at the Supreme Court summer compound here on Friday as militants, lawyers and human rights advocates protested increases in court docket fees to be generally to pay for the legislative allowances of justices.

Administrative Matter 04-2-04-SC, the latest Supreme Court circular, raises docket fees from a low of 1,000 pesos per and to a high of 4,000 pesos.

Consumer advocates of the activist Sanggunian 8 Youth have said the docket fee increases will hurt poorer litigants who can't afford to pay.

"Making cash to injury is a consider provision that makes litigants pay when they seek a review of a court-issued ruling," said Court Overseer, dean of the State Louis University law school.

"The circular makes the act of seeking justice a calculable jeopardy for the poor," he said.

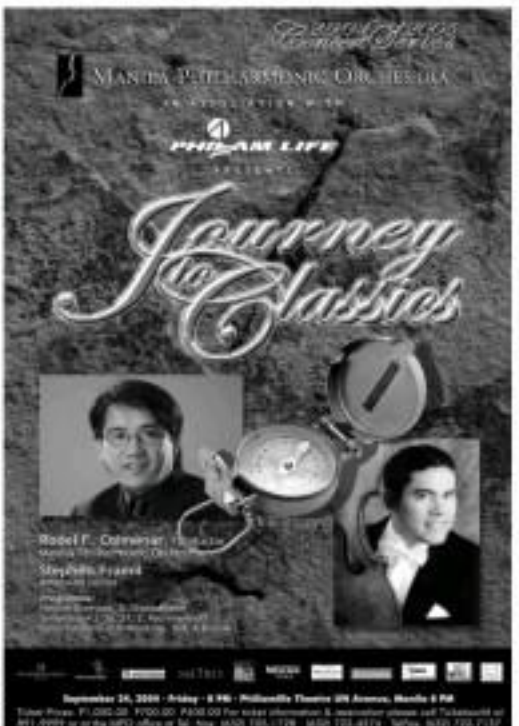
Overseer and Consolidated Bank and Trust Corp. (Solidbank) filed the petition.

Villages' group backs plan on 'Portagas'

THE LIGA ng mga Barangay sa Pilipinas, a 42,000-strong organization of barangay officials, has thrown its support behind a program designed to guarantee a steady supply of low-cost, high-quality fuel to the land transportation sector.

The program, called "Kapalaran ng mga Mapa ng Transportasyon, ayon sa Adbokasya," enables Filipino franchise holders to avail of government incentives to derive supplementary income and benefits to its members through a portable gasoline station, which is the Philippines' and probably the world's first.

The facility called Portagas, is an innovative concept from Shell, the major proponents of the program. The aim is to have one Portagas station in every district nationwide.



INQUIRER Visayas

John Jun Bandayrel
Baras Cruz Edralyn L. Benedicto

HIGHERS put together the solar panels for the Internet café on Cabilao Island off Loon town in Bohol. Solar power would keep computers working despite limited supply of electricity on the island.

Island hosts 1st 'Net café powered by sun

By Roy Luz
Cabilao Island, Bohol

IN THE Philippines, especially in areas outside urban centers, people are not really excited about highways. The roads are usually overpriced and substandard, and take forever to build.

But on Cabilao Island, that is exactly what residents and visitors are excited about these days. Not about the mission-inspired road that is still under construction, but a highway that is broader and cheaper, and connects directly to the whole world at the click of a button, that will officially open today.

Cabilao, a 1.4-square-kilometer islet off Loon town in Bohol with about 1,500 people, is already known worldwide. In the international dive circuit, it counts as among the dive jewels of the Philippines' underwater crown.

Today, it will be noted as the first island in the country to have a solar-powered Internet café—since the coffee, for now—and hooked into the Internet by satellite.

While solar power is not entirely new to the island (some people have solar power devices but mostly for home appliances), it will be the first time that modern appliances—to most of the world, at least—will be within the reach of ordinary residents.

For tourists, resort operators and islanders, many of whom have relatives abroad, mostly sailors, this is welcome news.

Joint project

The computer laboratory and Internet café is located at the Cabilao National High School, which has some 600 students. It is a joint project of the German Development Service (DED), Center for Industrial Technology and Enterprise (CITE), and the municipality of Loon.

Training and technical assistance were provided by the German Development Agency for Technical Cooperation-German Appropriate Technology Excellency Program (GTZ-GTE).

When he was approached by the GTZ through Jose Funk, DED's IT consultant and project coordinator in Samsung Bisaya Val Lapuz was only too happy that his town's quality was selected as site for the project.

"We've had computer donations from our congressman before, but they [units] were useless [since], if they were used at all, become cyners have to available only between 6 p.m. and till midnight," Lapuz said.

Hinto Garcia, the school principal, pointed out, however, that only one unit had been donated but was never used. "It will now finally be used," he added, "bringing the total computers now available to six."

The three resort operators on the island, including Nanay Simeona of Pelanis and tourism council representative in the project's management committee, supported the project as their clients would be among the main beneficiaries.

"The presence of three resorts was one determining factor for this project," said Funk. "The tourists will contribute much to the project's sustainability, as they will make the connection."

Charge for the use of computers will be pegged at an affordable rate of P30 per hour for the locals and P100 for tourists. The latter will have access only after school hours since the facility is mainly used by the computer literacy course of third and fourth year students. The same course will be offered to adult residents here.

Catalyst

The project cost P1.7 million—with 20,400 euros from GTZ for solar panels, batteries, inverters, computers and the satellite on-line connection for one year and P300,000 from the local governments for the infrastructure.

It offers students and residents greater ease of and faster contact with the rest of the world. Maybe not enough for Internet all the time, but through the more familiar and accessible mobile phones whose batteries can now be charged even during daytime.

STUDENTS of the Cabilao National High School in Bohol try their hands at surfing the Internet for the first time at the school's solar-powered Internet cafe, the first of its kind in the country.

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RP women fall prey to white slavery in Malaysian state

By Carla P. Gomez
PDI Foreign Bureau

BACOLOD CITY—Negros officials here sought the help of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (Owwa) and Negros congressmen to rescue four Negrense women alleged to be forced into prostitution in Sabah, Malaysia.

The four women were lured into white slavery in Sabah, on the coasts of Hongkong, Hunan, Macau, Tawaran and Cordoni, according to Rep. Ignacio Arroyo (Negros Occ., 4th District).

Arroyo said the plight of the Negrense women, who came from the towns under his district, was brought to his attention by Negros Occidental Vice Gov. Jocelyn Zayco.

He said he already asked Owwa's Marianito Roque to look into the plight of the four.

Zayco, on the other hand, said he had also asked for the help of Consul Rep. Apolonio Lolarga, who heads the "OFW Hotline" about what ever the 40% OFW channel every Saturday evening.

Lolarga said he will meet with the Malaysian ambassador to the Philippines to seek his help on the plight of the four Negrenses.

Zayco said he was alerted by the women's plight through a text message sent to him by one of the women.

The message said: "Vice gob, napulot kami ang agent sa mall, ginabalig-an kami sa kuta dito sa Malaysia. Dili pala gyud kami, we were fooled by our agent, we are being sold at a prostitution house here in Malaysia."

She also said how that they could not escape because the people who had custody of them had them.

The other women who had sought Zayco's help had also informed Isidro Agong of her plight. The woman said they address in Malaysia was VIP Coconut and Kinabalu Lodge in Mile 4 Jalan Labuk, Sabah.

Apparently it was not the first time Old Filipino women had been brought to Malaysia and forced into sex establishments.

A 28-year-old woman from La Castellana suffered the same plight in Malaysia and was rescued last year by Owwa officials who succeeded before the DSWD.

Foreign ownership way to revive mining industry, says mine exec

By Dennis Jay Santos
PDI Mindanao Bureau

DAVAO CITY—A mining mining executive said the Philippines should allow foreign ownership of mining companies.

The Supreme Court has already ruled that foreign investors could own companies exploiting the country's mineral resources.

Industry players had frowned at the decision while the government had lodged an appeal.

Benjamin Philip Romualdez, president and chief executive officer of Benguet Corp., said it is high time the government help the companies.

He said the mining industry could prove to be the country's life boat in the midst of the worsening fiscal crisis.

Romualdez told reporters here on Thursday that the Philippines is rich in mineral resources, with Mindanao ranking third in the list of the world's largest gold producers, but this advantage had not been exploited.

Despite the huge potential to mining, Romualdez said local companies could not have because capital investment to start up a company would need at least $2 billion.

Romualdez, also president of the Chamber of Mines, said the industry was happy that President Macapagal-Arroyo was a supporter of the mining industry's cause for foreign ownership of mining companies.

"President Arroyo has been listening. She strongly endorses the mining operation in Mindanao," he said.

Romualdez said the Mechanic Business Council (MBC) also recognized the importance of mining and that if required the government's position against the SC decision barring foreign ownership of mining companies.

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Local execs' group ready for war on IRA

THE [illegible] of Local Authorities of the Philippines (Ulap), the umbrella organization of governors, city governors, board members, city mayors, municipal mayors, vice mayors, councilors, barangay captains and liga chairmen, adopted yesterday a resolution strongly opposing any move in Congress to cut the Internal Revenue allotment (IRA) to save the budget deficit.

In a statement, Ulap Chairman Jesse Robredo reminded the Congress that the IRA should not be cut "because it is the legal and moral share of local government units from the earnings of government."

Robredo said the IRA is the "lifeblood" of LGUs in the delivery of basic services to the people.

He said the operations of LGUs would be paralyzed if the IRA is cut or its release is suspended.

On a motion of Eastern Samar Gov. Ben Evardone, Ulap adopted a resolution commending President Macapagal-Arroyo for her support in a move by Rep. Joey Salceda to cut the IRA.

Evardone, in the same statement, said the Agusan solon's "ill-timed proposal to cut the needs of LGUs" and asked the President not to be swayed by recommendations from some congressmen who are insensitive to the plight of local governments.

Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr., who was guest of Ulap, said any move to reduce or suspend the release of IRA would be illegal and unlawful.

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3 life terms for Sef Gonzales

Turn to page A-11

The killings Baguio would rather forget

Turn to page A-11

daughter Cristina in Australia were a big story for Baguio residents.

After all, the Gonzaleses were well known in this city before they migrated to Australia.

But when their son Sef was accused of the murders a year later, the local interest turned into public vituperation.

Baguio officials, lawyers and residents said there was good reason the three life sentences meted out on Sef by a New South Wales court did not leave too much of a stain in the city.

Quake aftermath

"The truth is everyone knew Bobby and Ate (Baguio Award) parents, but nobody knew Sef. I was Bobby's grade school classmate, but I never met the son," said Carlo Homeres Bernardo, former vice president for liaison at the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"I only know that Bobby was very influential during (the July 1990 earthquake) when a wall of their house toppled and almost crushed Cristina. That was the reason they migrated to Sydney," he said.

Baguio Rep. Mauricio Domogan, who was visiting his office across an Baguio mayor in July 2004, the month when the murders occurred, could still remember his emotions when he heard about the killings.

"I was packing my things when I heard the news about the Gonzales massacre. Like everyone else, we were very angry because the news said it was (a hate crime)," Domogan said.

"But when Sef was arrested, we all felt the family's shock, and there was sadness they also felt. Ate (Cristina) Sef was no longer mentioned in Baguio."

Closing the lands

Mario Gonzales Rivera, Inc. president and Exchange Commissioner, said Cristina's brother, regional director and mayor of Baguio said the conviction should end the unwarranted public interest in their family.

"We don't want Baguio to have arguments when we (sef)," Rivera told the reporters. "It should end here."

Throughout Sef's trial, she had always asked reporters to respect the family's privacy—and I say all sorts obliged.

Domogan said the murders had shaken the walls of conservative-minded Baguio, a city built by the American colonial government in 1900.

Stories about a moral angle in the Gonzales murders resonated strongly among Baguio's conservatives, he said.

Who is to blame?

In the end, Domogan said, it was Baguio's conservatives which convinced residents to "simply forget the murders happened."

"The bigger shock to us was when Sef, the son of a prominent family was accused of the murders," he said. "Baguio residents have always been very good parents."

"I don't want to shift blame on Australia, but we in Baguio realized that Sef might have changed when his family migrated," Domogan added. "There must be something about Sydney's culture (of independence which traumatizes) into bad adolescent behavior. I have a relative who was (sent) by his parented adventures to the United States."

Domogan said both the Gonzales and Clarkdales families had become exclusive because of the tragedy.

"They never asked us for help. The city government's only public intervention was to lobby for a swift investigation when some claimed that it was a racial attack on a Filipino family," he said.

Turn to page A-11

division commander.

He described the killing spree as he knew.

The judge said there was no evidence mental illness played a part in the murders.

"I consider that the murders showed features of very great heinousness and that there are no facts mitigating the objectives or intent of the murders and hence the acts fall within the worst category of cases of murder or manslaughter," Jones said.

"(Sef) has not demonstrated any insight into the enormity of the offenses he has committed or any acceptance of responsibility," the judge added.

Relatives in tears

Gonzales maintained his innocence throughout his trial.

The Gonzaleses were from Baguio City. A lawyer and devout Catholic, Bobby Gonzales brought his family to Australia in 1991, and set up a successful legal practice specializing in immigration matters.

Surviving members of the Gonzales family were where the sentences were handed down, but Gonzales showed very little emotion.

He will serve the sentences concurrently but needs to Sydney reported he is unlikely ever to be released due to the severity of his crimes.

Outside the court, family members cried they were relieved there ordeal was finally over.

"It's not really over not this because we love Sef very much but I'm just glad it's over as well," Tan said finally. I once said, "We will always love him."

Poison failed

The killings happened at the family home in a suburb in Eastern of Sydney.

During a six-week trial, prosecutors said the seven Gonzales screamed his parents' arms discipline and their disapproval of his girlfriend, and he feared he would be disinherited.

They said Gonzales tried to poison his family one week before the murders with herbal plant seeds ordered over the internet.

When the plan failed, he stabbed his mother, father and sister to death every a three-hour period in the family home, lying in wait through the evening as each returned home separately presumptuous said.

Police said Gonzales claimed he had seen an intruder fleeing his home but a forensic search found no trace of a man.

Angry amateur

They also said that, to cover suspicion from himself, Gonzales daubed racist graffiti—saying "F— Indian"—on the kitchen wall in spray paint, traces of which were found on his jumper.

When police raided Gonzales' computer they had found references to Internet sites, such as "how to kill" and "white race killer." There was also a translation of poems in his bedroom.

Gonzales pleaded not guilty, initially claiming he was doing work if words there claiming he was at a location at the time of the murders.

However, investigators found the prosecution he claimed to be with was now long out the day in question.

Police also said Gonzales had stabbed his sister more than twice with a baseball bat, then strangled and stabbed her. He then stabbed to death his father and mother one at a time as they sat and lived home from work.

Prosecutors described the crime as "a slaughter by an angry amateur." AP and AFP

AT A GLANCE

Chronology of murder

February 1999—Sef Gonzales starts the behavior for possession plants, and violence without needs. Sef steals from and lies to them with and is caught. He keeps the unpaid portion to utilize computer and translator earlier. He signs a letter to a major food company: "Three of your products have been poisoned. By now they are unrepresentable shelves. This is what you get for treating employees like garbage. Good luck finding another two bottles poisoned one, not to many!"

July 2, 2001—The letter arrives. Sef also writes letters to the Federal Police and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. A week of the letters will be taken found and his father, and his fingerprint lifted from one of the envelopes.

July 5, 2001—Sef's mother suffers from "fever, severe abdominal pain and bloody diarrhoea" and is brought to Sydney Adventist Hospital. Sef also lodges a false complaint against her, telling people that there might have been something in the tap water at a restaurant for which the family had dined.

July 6, 2001—After his mother recovers and she is home, investigators suspect that Sef tried to cause one of the victims for weeks having realized he could no longer continue with the poisoning plan. He likely threw the remaining seeds into the backyard. Three years later a gardening giant to discovered growing there.

July 10, 2001—Sister, 49, Mary Lou, 43, and 19-year-old Cristina are killed to death in the family's North Ryde home. Eric Gonzales finds them. He tells police that he had listened to them with a friend.

July 13, 2001—Sef makes a public appeal for information about the murders, saying he has been here at the four corners of the world.

July 19, 2001—Sef gives a eulogy to the killers at the slain family's funeral service.

Dec. 26, 2003—Sef's former fiance tells her they don't believe his story.

June 10, 2002—Sef is arrested at his unit at the high-end Bentleigh Apartments on Robinson Street in Chatswood district near Sydney.

June 10, 2002—He is charged with three counts of murder. He pleads not guilty to all counts, but does not apply for bail.

May 6, 2003—Sef launches a bid to gain control of the multimillion-dollar inheritance to pay his legal bills. His lawyers appear before the New South Wales Supreme Court seeking the accused murderer's access to the family's fortune in Australia and the Philippines believed to be around A$1.9 million (US$1.31 million).

May 28, 2003—Hearing is postponed to April to rule on claims in the multimillionaire inheritance. His parents declare family solidarity meant for the inheritance despite his being charged with the family's murders.

June 17, 2003—The court refuses him access to the family's estate. The court is told the estate is worth $1,900,000 ($1.3 million) and that the family also held considerable assets in the Philippines.

Aug. 29, 2003—Magistrate Greg Grove says prosecutors have presented strong enough evidence during a four-day hearing to send it on.

April 6, 2004—Prosecutor says the Filipino-Australian law student stabbed the wealthy father, mother and sister to death because he feared they would disown him over his choice of girlfriend and his bad grades.

May 20, 2004—Sef is found guilty of murdering his parents and his 19-year-old sister. Prosecutors say Gonzales may be set free later to get his hands on a 1.3 million-Australian dollar (US$1 million) inheritance.

Aug. 17, 2004—Prosecutors demand three life sentences for Sef for the "callous" and "premeditated" slayings.

Sept. 17, 2004—Sef Gonzales is sentenced to three life terms. *PDI Research*

METRO
Joel Title Cornel B. Bito, Jaime G. Dayanghirang

Sorry, wrong number

By Tina G. Santos

QUEZON City Mayor Feliciano Belmonte warned the Philippine Long Distance Telephone company to discontinue immediately the International Direct Dialing service from all city hall offices.

Belmonte said this is not only part of the austerity measures being implemented in the city, but was also triggered by his discovery that a single telephone line was billed a total of P696,900.20 for one month.

Wrong billing

The Administrative Management Office had been ordered by the mayor to conduct an investigation of city hall's telephone and power usage to find ways to reduce expenses.

The inventory included the checking of illegal connections common in city institutions like health centers in areas where industrial outlets could readily tap electric power lines.

On one occasion, huge bills had been charged to the lawyer's office when he had been on leave. The inventory also led to the discovery that city hall was billed for the use of 15,000 overnights when only about 11,000 were functioning.

Corvera burial

METEORS journalist Alberto E. Corvera will be interred this afternoon at the Bonifacio Cemetery in Malolos City.

Corvera, 67, was given a fitting tribute last night at the National Press Club of which he was a lifetime member.

Ferry revival on Pasig mulled

FLYING HIGH. Manila-based men show off their skills in a practice session at the Quezon Memorial Circle in Quezon City. RAFFY LERMA

By Margaux C. Ortiz

THE REVIVAL of the ferry service on the Pasig River would be a great help in decongesting Metro Manila's traffic-choked roads, according to the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority.

MMDA Chair and Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission (PRRC) Co-Chair Bayani Fernando yesterday said the PRRC and the Department of Transportation and Communication (DOTC) held a public hearing last week to get the views of the water service industry on the possible revival of the ferry service.

"The ferry service answers the need for an alternate mode of transport to augment and ease Metro Manila's road transport system," Fernando said.

Odor, debris problems

Magsaysay Lines and four small ferry corp., former operators of the Pasig ferry line, ceased operations because of the river's foul odor and dirty waters, he added.

"The floating debris (removal of the river's propeller) from functioning properly," Fernando said, adding that the load smell also discouraged commuters from riding the boats.

Harvard also encountered financial and management problems, he added.

Harvard, which was put up in 1996 in line with President Fidel Ramos' administration's efforts to resurrect the Pasig River's former glory, hosted around 3,000 to 5,000 passengers daily.

But the MMDA chair said the PRRC's continuous efforts to clean up Pasig River had improved its water quality.

Fernando said the agency and the local governments have since removed 20 percent of the garbage recovered from the 1991.

He also said that the continuous improvements included the construction of linear parks on the riverbanks.

"The former operators' past experiences could help a lot in order to ensure the success of the new venture," Fernando said.

He added: "Whatever problems encountered before could be averted especially with the concerted efforts of the national and local governments, the PRRC and various non-government organizations, to revive the Pasig River."

Fernando also said that the service could also be extended to the coastal towns near Manila Bay, Laguna de Bay, and the Marikina River.

MMDA Deputy Chair Cesar Lacuna said they would coordinate with the Department of Transportation and Communication in putting up jetport-type areas (for terminals for the passengers' convenience.

Before it ceased operations, Harvard had 13 primary stations located at Escolta, Bgy. San Isidro, Jones Bridge/Escolta, Binondo in Mandaluyong, Pasig High School, Bambang (Pasig), Tapuja, Rosario (Pasig), Lambingan Bridge (Sta. Ana), Guadalupe, Buendia/Ayala and Mauves Bridge.

Viable alternative

A trip from Pasig to Escolta only took 35 minutes, providing commuters a viable alternative to road transport, without traffic and pollution problems encountered by regular bus and jeepney passengers.

Fares were set at P20 for a one-way trip along the route onboard the 130-seater ferry boat.

Homeless rounded up

By Tarra V. Quismundo

FROM places they considered their homes (here in Manila's bay area, 650 homeless persons were rescued to be returned to their homes as placed in institutions.

They were plucked from sidewalks, tunnels, parks and stations made in the Tondo and Malate districts, in a mass operation of the Manila Department of Social Welfare (MDSW).

Thirteen kids aged Thursday until daybreak on Friday, the MDSW took custody of street dwellers, beggars and destitutes, including infants, toddlers, teenagers and old men and women, according to MDSW chief Jose Bernardo.

The MDSW conducted the six-hour sweep from Plaza Lawton and Rajah Sulayman Park, the sidewalks of Padre Gil and Pedro Gil streets, the Roxas Boulevard flyovers, portions of Taft Avenue and T.M. Kalaw Street.

Barangay chairs from the two districts, policemen from the Ermita and Malate stations, the City Hall detachment of the RPG Special Operations Group and the National Parks Development Office, that maintains Rizal Park, took part in the operation, as part of the three-month old Dyan Lingap Silaga program of the MDSW.

Those rounded up were brought to the MDSW dormitory-in-the-making on Roxas Street for identification purposes.

The MDSW would then determine where they would be brought next.

Bernardo said that those from Manila would be taken back to their families or brought to their homes, in the case of male youngsters.

Those from other Metro Manila cities would be turned over to the local social welfare departments in their cities, while those from provinces or areas outside Metro Manila would be transported in the Jose Rizal-Ila Center in Mandaluyong run by the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

Substandard LPG tanks destroyed

By Pennel W. Dantiago

A TOTAL of 362 substandard liquefied petroleum gas cylinders previously seized during random inspections in Metro Manila were destroyed yesterday as part of a continued drive against unscrupulous LPG retailers.

Trade Undersecretary Adrian S. Cristobal Jr. also said the Department of Trade and Industry's drive would be extended to the third region after a commitment to cooperate was made by the Albay Filipino Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The consumer group Alliance Watch also joined the effort.

The 362 tanks were part of a 210-tank delivery seized earlier this month from nine LPG retailers.

Working with the DTI's special monitoring team were the Department of Energy and LPG Industry Association that conducted random checks in Taguig, Pateros and Sta. Cruz in Manila last Sept. 2-3.

The cylinders were confiscated because they did not have the required markings that prove these had undergone quality tests and passed product standards.

Also cited during the inspections were 64 LPG retailers selling under-filled cylinders.

Under a Department of Energy circular, "a shortage of more than (300 grams) per cylinder shall constitute an act of under-filling."

Cristobal said suppliers and retailers were jointly liable for a fine of P1,000 or a year in jail or both for those who sold cylinders where the net contents were less than indicated on the containers, package, label or as advertised.

Some of the LPG tanks inspected were found to be under-filled by as much as 1.7 kilograms, he said.

The seven retailers were clearing consumers by at least P65 per tank, Cristobal said.

No cell phone snatchings in Davao City

ON TARGET
Ramon Tulfo

CELL PHONE theft or robbery is very common in Metro Manila. Every single day scores of mobile phones are stolen or taken by force in offices, in the streets, on public vehicles.

I hate to say, "I told you so" but I've been urging the police to get hard on cell phone robbers and scores that sell stolen mobile phones.

The police know which stores sell stolen cell phones in Metro Manila. These stores are at the Pera Mall in Escondida, San Jose, at the Bonanque Market in Manila, on Recto Avenue and in Baclaran in Manila.

But why are the police going after cell phone thieves and robbers and their bosses only now? Because of the series of articles on the rampant incidence of cell phone theft and robbery on the Inquirer front page.

For weeks, I've been urging against the rampant theft and robbery of cell phones and money that sold stolen mobile phones, but the police did not budge. Until the Inquirer special reports came.

* * *

In Davao City, cell phone owners can use their phones in the streets without fear of the device being snatched from them.

Cell phone snatchers and robbers have either fled the city or have been booted to the cemetery.

A shadowy vigilante group responsible for the killings of notorious criminals in the city has eliminated cell phone robbery in the streets.

Two or three years ago, a 14-year-old hood snatched the mobile phone of a physically handicapped student. The young hood stabbed the student when the latter resisted.

The young hood was caught. But he didn't end up in jail, he ended up in the morgue. He was executed by the city's vigilante group.

Those used to be two stores (find bought and sold stolen mobile phones. Their owners were summoned by Mayor Rodrigo Duterte to the office. The mayor warned the fences that if they continued with their nefarious trade, they might end up like the 14-year-old hood.

The notorious fences fled the city.

* * *

The Manila Regional Court moved our last Wednesday the death penalty to a man charged with robbing and killing a Taiwanese and Hong Kong businessman, Chun Shiou Chang, and his Filipino wife, Leonora Bernardo, in Malate, Manila, in 1994.

The relatives of the Filipino wife cheered RTC Judge Lucia Asuncion for the verdict.

But there's nothing to praise Judge Asuncion for.

Why? Because it took him 10 years to reach the verdict. Why it took him a decade to resolve the robbery-slaying case is a sad and sad commentary on our justice system.

Justice delayed is justice denied. What if the accused, Emmanuel Pecho, was innocent? He would have been executed 10 years.

Isn't there a directive from the Supreme Court giving lower courts a time frame within which to decide on a case? Ah, probably the time frame is 100 years.

(Editor's note: In an interview which was reported by the Inquirer, Judge Asuncion said he was the fifth judge to handle the case.)

Usec was sacked–GMA

Front page A1

The President only smiled when asked if the two officials were told to resign and did not quit voluntarily, as Perez had claimed in his case. She could not concentrate for try to some.

"Let's not talk about any specific person, because we are remembering," she said. "We are recognizing the government and I think those who have reserved to the private sector for having served the government."

No replacement

Ms Arroyo said she had no plan to replace Perez.

"Actually, with finance we don't need to replace a particular undersecretary. You can give his job to another undersecretary," she said.

Ms Arroyo, who had complained of the low pay she was getting in the government, Mr Ayroso said she had found a replacement whose name she could not recall.

"Actually, early on in my new administration I was already told that the [Esperon] wife going to resign. And her son-in-law said the recommendation was to accept the resignation," the President said.

She likened Esperon's resignation, did not have much of an effect on the government's finances and borrowings.

"Actually, there's no need for a transition because [Undersecretary] Cielito Habito is the chair of the auction committee. [Esperon's] replacement can come in tomorrow because the policy direction are done at the level of Eric Perez," she said.

Unsympathetic

In her statement, Ramos said Perez's resignation was "an act of defiance that must be seen as a positive sign."

"In the end, the important thing is that the truth prevails and people are judged accordingly," Ramos said.

But reactions were unsympathetic.

According to Alberto Romulo, former undersecretary director of the Development Bank Agency Tax Credit and Duty Drawback Center (DBA), Perez's resignation "does not free him of responsibility or complicity in the bungling of the [tax credit scam case."

"His resignation should pave the way for an immediate and impartial investigation of his conduct as DTI-TDC co-chair and a full and independent financial and performance audit of [the tax fraud]," Tolentino said in a statement.

In a separate statement, Wilson Gamboa, lead lawyer of the DBA employees complaining of harassment in the tax fraud, scoffed at Perez's claim that he had angered some politicians because of the filing of 1,000 criminal cases against finance officials.

"The truth of the matter was that he did not deliver what was expected of him," Gamboa said, adding:

"It was a non-performance."

Wave of resignations

As finance undersecretary, Perez was also in charge of the government's borrowings. But he denied that his resignation was precipitated by policy differences with other officials.

Perez's resignation came after Esperon quit to return to the private sector. Makati Stock Corp. president Roger Murphy has also resigned to enjoy his retirement.

The wave of resignations came while the government continues to grapple with a huge budget deficit brought about by piling debts, a large chunk of which was assumed by government-owned and -controlled corporations.

Sturdy laptop takes brunt of GMA temper

Front page A1

(with letters)

But has the President actually thrown a laptop?

Laptop thrown a couple of times

Yesterday during the luncheon she hosted for the Makati ang Pinoy Corps, Private Municipal Service Employees Organization that she had thrown her laptop a couple of times, not to anyone in particular and usually out of frustration.

She was reading portions of her 130-page Medium Term Development Plan from a wood, black Toshiba laptop, when a reporter asked if she was the same computer she reportedly threw in a moment of job-related frustration.

"Yes, this is the one," Ms Arroyo said, pausing. "I once threw this when we were on a plane and it still runs."

Ms Arroyo showed reporters gathered at the State Dining Room how it happened.

Mad about something

She closed her MTDP file, turned off the computer, and declared it shut. The president could be really mad? Says nurse could do so more than an ang pagsasalita (I told them what to do, but they did not follow my instructions)."

She lifted the laptop a few inches and then banged it on the table. She did this twice.

"I was not mad at the computer. I was mad about something [else]," she said.

Environment Secretary Mike Defensor, who was there Ms Arroyo's campaign spokesperson, was on the plane with her when it happened.

"She was furious because a speech had not been prepared for she instructed it to be[. Hapunsiela siya [She had it]," he said. They were flying from Pangasinan to Laguna de Oro's province during the presidential campaign.

Ms Arroyo also started shouting at Defensor, telling him not to make her campaign schedule so hectic.

After the President threw the laptop, she started to cool down.

Defensor suggested that she buy a new laptop.

Ms Arroyo agreed, noting that the laptop battery was always on the blink.

Image model

"No wonder, the laptop may be seriously broken," he said. Apparently, it was not the first time the laptop had been thrown.

Defensor also suggested that the President could be an "image model" for the tough laptop.

"Be [Defensor] said I should be a laptop model. Ha ha ha!" Ms Arroyo said, laughing.

Press Undersecretary Isabel de Leon assured that the President considers her laptop indispensable.

"All her speeches, her memorandum, everything is in that laptop," De Leon said.

Aside from the laptop, the President has been known to throw other of her eyeglasses and throw them when she gets irritated with officials who cannot comply with her directives. She has accidentally cut on them as well.

Two pairs from Yap

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap recently gave her two pairs of sturdy and cushion-ready eyeglasses.

Ms Arroyo's old pair had apparently cracked from all that abuse.

There was also told that she once threw a sandwich at a Cabinet official during a meeting.

Reporters who used to cover Ms Arroyo when she was a senator said she would throw documents at her staff when they could not give her what she needed.

No quotas

The President has an aversion to public solicitations of money, whether they are for worthy causes, whenever their performance falls short of the expected targets.

However, there was an issue of that nature yesterday when she hosted lunch for newspapers, TV and radio reporters covering the Palace.

Ms Arroyo earlier had dinner with the government-owned and -controlled corporations heads and officials at the Palace, during which she served a "Russian dinner" of raw piece of chicken and vegetables or "succulent plants" plants and animals.

Monogrammed silverware

In contrast, Palace reporters ate on monogrammed silverware, although the menu contained simple soup, fish fillet with rice and steamed vegetables, fruit salad and tea.

She said she wanted to "save" the government P100 billion in expenditures by serving simple meals served on plastic plates during large Palace gatherings.

A reporter asked if this included the cost of bamboo for the diplomatic corps. Was the President prepared to make a feast with foreign envoys on plastic cups?

The President again laughed and shook her head.

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BUSINESS

Editor Raul D. Maronilla
Assistant Editor Corrie S. Nolasco

Gov't to push bill capping public debt

(See stock market report on Page B3)

By Michelle V. Rerea

ANADS that the government needs to discipline itself from resorting to too much borrowings, the department of Budget and Management will push for a bill putting a cap on public debt.

Budget Secretary Emilia Boncodin said the DBM was preparing a debt reduction schedule for the medium term, in which the country's public sector debt would be reduced to only 50 percent of gross domestic product by 2010.

The schedule will be used as a basis in determining the debt cap. This means that with the target of reducing public sector debt to 50 percent of GDP in 2010, the debt cap proposed, if approved by Congress for legislation, would require the government to have limited its outstanding amount of borrowings only to that amount.

"We have to do this so that we can discipline ourselves," Boncodin said.

As of end-2003, the consolidated public sector debt stood at P3.9 trillion, or 137.5 percent of GDP. Consolidated public sector debt is the combined liabilities of the national government, local government units (LGUs) and government-owned corporations. Of the three, only LGUs have been posting surpluses from their budgets and have therefore been kept blameless from the fiscal enforcement.

The plan to put a cap on debt will be embedded in the fiscal responsibility bill, a draft of which is being prepared by the DBM for submission to Congress.

Aside from capping debt, the fiscal responsibility bill also calls for prudence in expenditures. Specifically, the bill will require that for every proposed program or project, which will definitely require funding, proponents should also state where or how they will source the required revenue. Without having a new revenue source, there can be no expenditure should new goods through, according to the idea of the bill.

BONCODIN

Public sector debt has grown over the years because of the annual government's and state-owned firms' budget deficits, or the gap between higher expenditure and lower revenue each year. Borrowings were made to fund the budget deficits over the past years, which has thrown the public sector debt to 137.5 percent of GDP as of end-2003 from only 114 percent in 1997.

The national government's budget deficit alone stood at P282 billion in 2002 and P199.9 billion last year. It is hoping to slightly raise it down to P197.6 billion this year, and to gradually reduce it over the next five to six years until it goes down to zero by 2009 to 2010.

But of the fiscal measures of the Arroyo administration is the cutting of expenditure by eliminating the bureaucracy and the imposition of revenue-enhancement proposals, such as new taxes.

RP far from Argentina-type crisis, says US firm

THE PHILIPPINE government's recent sovereign debt issue, from which it raised $1 billion, was an indication the country is far from a fiscal crisis because it can still easily access the international capital markets.

This was the assessment made by international investment bank Bear, Stearns and Co. Inc., which said the strong appetite of the market for the bonds issued by the government reflected confidence of creditors in the Philippines.

"The success of the recent re-opening of the Philippine 2025 and 2015 bonds demonstrated that ... price concessions comparing the Philippines to Argentina are grossly exaggerated," said Bear, Stearns in a paper on the Philippine economy.

Argentina went into a financial crisis a few years ago when it lost investor confidence due to its mounting political and economic problems. Negative perception on Argentina classified as worse recently.

Last Sept. 9, the Philippine government sold $1000 million worth of bonds maturing in 2015 and $700 million worth of debt paper maturing in 2025, or a total of $1 billion. The government sold the bonds at prices of 99 percent for the 2015 bonds, and 106.25 percent for the 2025 bonds.

According to the Department of Finance, the bond issue through which the government initially intended to raise only $750 million, was oversubscribed by more than six times. Although "cheap" pricing of the bonds were said to be the reason for the recent acceptance of the market, the DOF said the strong appetite was also because the market was still confident in the Philippines.

The bulk of the proceeds of the bond issue, or $750 million, will be used to complete the financing requirement of state-owned National Power Corp. A huge part of its financing requirement was the payment of its liabilities to independent power producers.

According to Bear, Stearns, the government's move to sell bonds as much 2025 bonds compared with the 2015 bonds was a strategic one, because it extended its overall sovereign portfolio. It

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HUMBLY CLEAR OUT OF YOUR WAY.

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3 YEAR WARRANTY

MWSI creditors want ₱50-M payback

By Christine A. Gaylican

THE FOREIGN creditors of Maynilad Water Services Inc. (MWSI) are demanding the immediate payment of some P50 million in administrative fees.

Docket 04-1 by Citicorp, who reportedly succeeded the $120-million performance bond, are seeking payment of issuance fees amid pending court rehabilitation.

"This would carve out additional other assets and should not be made part of Maynilad's other liabilities which are not a thing in this court," said Orbe Bautista' lawyer Editor Pantaleon in a recent hearing at the Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 88.

However, Maynilad lawyers contested the banks' court petition. MWSI lead counsel Siguion Reyna argued that the fees should be made part of the company's liabilities, the settlement of which was still being negotiated in court.

The government counsel led by Manuel A.J. Trehuelero, former justice undersecretary, supported Cebu's court arguments.

"The amounts involved are substantial, and it would be better to include it within the settlement of Maynilad's other liabilities," said Trehuelero.

The government-led Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) is the top of Maynilad's list of creditors. The other creditors, with a total of ₱6 billion in exposures are Credit Agricole, Indosuez Merchant Bank Asia Ltd., Citibank NA, Barclays Bank PLC, BNP Paribas, Equitable PCI Bank, Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., and state-owned Development Bank of the Philippines.

In the new rehabilitation plan, the banks are again offered debt-to-equity conversion schemes. The court has given them until Monday next week to comment on the new rehabilitation plan presented by Maynilad.

According to a new rehabilitation plan filed on Friday with Regional Trial Court Branch 90, Maynilad's performance bond of $120 million would have to be paid to regulator Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, Trehuelero told the court.

Null and avoid

JEE FORBES! watch right now is that your stomach is not full. Please forgive me. I am going to talk about something dirty. It's one of those brown blue ribbon committee hearings.

Recently, the committee held some more hearings to hunt the dreaded horse or worm called the "poll automation project" of the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

That's the computerized counting of the votes, an actually mandated by a real live republic act—a 2003 law, surprisingly, what the law required did not happen at all.

The committee wondered the hour it got, you see, only seven days ago, after the votes have already been counted. Supposedly!

* * *

AS YOU know, the counting was done manually. And on top of all, the Comelec actually paid for the (used) counting machines, albeit just partially with our tax money.

That certain situation seemed to be interested in finding out whether or not the Comelec had been ripped. The machines was said to have been ... well, DYSFUNCTIONAL.

In the hearing, certain senators tried to pry from Comelec officials the price of the counting machines per unit. The Comelec officials did not know.

So why did the Comelec not push the figure out of the mouths of the executives of the project contractor, a consortium called Mega Pacific?

Also, specific dog when all the votes have been counted, supposedly, the Comelec will award one central file source prize! Sige, the diamond thing was overpriced.

After all, any businessman would rather be cooped in bed with a few toys, before they would diwalgo trade secrets. Prizes, i.e. pabaons, are only the biggest trade secret!

It's as if many of our senators are small followers of the monopolistic or authority in the branch field of computerization, which we mentioned in Know in the Supreme Court.

"Overpriced," was also one of the suspicions of the Supreme Court, when it ruled to declare the Comelec contracts with Mega Pacific null and void.

* * *

BUTWHOO na gids, lest the senators hear about it, when any government office holds any hearings for any contract, it normally provides scrolling.

The government office also acts as tons of paper in the process of determining the ranking, handing out scores of studies, doing all that so-called "staff work."

In the case of the Comelec, it sat down with representatives of the "Independent" Nortel, together with "cognate" of the IT industry, for endless meetings over the project.

Together, the Comelec and the private sector arrived at a contract ceiling price of P900 million for the machines, plus P400 million for the software to run them.

All the bids theoretically should stay below the ceiling, or else the Comelec would throw them out right away without looking. All the bids conformed.

And so, after the bidding had been closed, and one pesang had been counting, the others had LESS some kindhearted, subterranean soul with the sweeping assurance of "overpriced." In tens of billions!

* * *

STILL, during the blue ribbon hearings, Comelec officials tried to explain the difference between the winning bid and the second closest losing bid.

The answer, as I said, was Mega Pacific. Its closest rival was the Total Information Management, or TIM.

Comelec Commissioner Resurrection Borra explained that the difference between their bids was actually P6.2 billion. In other words, the difference was not a joke.

Actually, Mega Pacific asked for P5.248 billion for the contract—or below the ceiling set by the Comelec and its "advisors" from Stanford and the IT industry "GROUP."

The second closest bid, at P5.897 billion from TIM, was also below the ceiling.

Borra stated that the TIM offered to count only the votes in Mindanao and Metro Manila, while Mega Pacific would cover the entire country.

If TIM won the case, if Comelec could customize the counting in Metro Manila and Mindanao, the machines would not have served its purpose.

Look, where did all the much talked about bigamist shouting in the last elections take place? Well, in places which the TIM proposed did not count!

Somebody actually overcame the huge loads of the opposition, mainly through the magnificent turnouts in Cebu and Western Visayas, where else somebody got most of the votes. Not in Metro Manila and Mindanao!

* * *

ANYWHO, using simple arithmetic, Borra arrived at a figure of P4.45 billion as the actual difference between the lowest and the second lowest bids.

Under the TIM offer, the Comelec could save the taxpayers a cozen, only about 15 million cozen. The Comelec needed a cozen for 900-million cozen.

The bid of TIM would put the cost of the counting at P98.38 per vote. Multiply this with the number of votes in the country, and you get P5.7 billion as totalized.

The Mega Pacific bid, however, offered to count all 40 million votes, at a price of P53.22 per vote for a total of P2.2 billion.

And so if you were the Comelec, which of the two would you have chosen? Borra said it chose the Mega Pacific bid, because the government could have saved P6.42 billion.

Now I don't know if that is a big amount for this hamburger-size administration, but to me, it means I can already buy some toilipapers' private jet to attend weddings in Hawaii.

* * *

ALL right, the thinking of some senators was that, if the Comelec would buy the machines directly from the makers in South Korea, it would not cost Comelec all of the P900 million, or the ceiling set by the computers under the contract.

Ergo, the machines were over-priced!

But then again, buying the machines directly from the manufacturer in South Korea, and then making the machines to fit local conditions, also would cost.

For one, as everybody in the IT business knows, you cannot just import any computer, if you have specific needs. You have to modify them somehow.

The machines were actually tried and tested in elections in South Korea. It did not mean that the machines would actually serve the unique election system in the country.

Also, you have to make them adapt to the rough conditions in a tropical climate like the Philippines. Did we mention rainy season? And worry-other known thing!

I mean, some-on, all this noise about a project which never was, only seven to several every in-season today that, in the country, "residents" do not know anything, because somebody cut all wires question them, and the semibillionaire Supreme Court will cancel them, not to mention the senseless congressional hearings.

Sunday Times Magazine readers no take a look? They will just send tal

BOI-listed firms urged to sell shares to public

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange (PSE) is calling on registered companies of the Board of Investments (BOI) to hand over a portion of the ownership of their companies to the public by listing on the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE).

"It's publish time," declared newly installed PSE president Francis Lim during yesterday's press conference. "But to ask for these companies availing of government incentives, they should give their fair share to investors."

The Omnibus Investments Code or Executive Order 226, enacted in 1987, requires that 10 percent of registered companies under the BOI be held by the public within ten years from registration. To date, about 1,000 firms are listed with the BOI.

Lim has been on the job for only two days. He said one of his priorities is pushing the creation of a market-integrity board (MIB) which he hoped to put in place before the end of the month.

The MIB, which has yet to be approved by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), will replace PSE's quasi-judicial committee (QJC), body composed of brokers (dealers) and brokers that monitors compliance of brokers and listed firms to securities and stock exchange rules.

Lim said former Supreme Court Justice Jose Vitug, former SEC commissioner Mercedes Gotiong and PSE director Pacita Sison accepted their membership in the MIB.

Lim as PSE president will be part of the board, but as a non-voting member. He will be tasked to complement the mission of the MIB.

It was suggested that the MIB must ensure uniform decisions or actions taken by the *supervising and surveillance Group* which would be called the Market Regulatory Office (MRO).

The MIB would also oversee the activities of the MRO. It would also initiate studies to enhance rules on audit, compliance and surveillance.

DISCLOSURES

PHILIPPINE Long Distance Telephone Co. disclosed the sale by one of its officers, Ysmaela Casuela, first vice president, of his 1,000 shares in the company for ₱1,305 each.

* * *

MANUNIT Trust Corp. announced the resignation of Angel Unsal as director, treasurer and chair of the company's executive committee effective Oct. 16.

* * *

ABOITIZ Equity Ventures Inc. bought 95,314 of its own shares at ₱3.80 each.

* * *

El Nido Corporation resigned as corporate secretary; compliance officer and corporate information officer of **Fortune General Corp.** Atty. Ruby Sarah Silvestre was elected to act as the corporate head of Champonia.

* * *

The Board of **Makati Finance Corp.** approved the write-off of ₱11.8 million in inactivities out of the company's loss provisions. **Compiled by Marlene R. Tatlonghari, PDP-Research**

CURRENCIES

September 17, 2004	Cash Equivalent	Savings Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.018868	1.000000
Japan	Yen	0.202305	10.947.21
United Kingdom	Pound	1.471.18	0.679.77
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.145833	6.857.14
Switzerland	Franc	0.646154	1.547.62
Canada	Dollar	0.020713	48.275.86
Australia	Dollar	0.013.72	72.992.70
New Zealand	Dollar	0.012.82	78.000.00
Euro Area	Euro	0.015.38	65.000.00
Sweden	Krona	0.139.53	7.166.67
Norway	Krone	0.140.85	7.100.00
Denmark	Krone	0.115.38	8.666.67
Singapore	Dollar	0.032.26	31.000.00
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.071.43	14.000.00
Thailand	Baht	0.727.27	1.375.00
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	0.071.43	14.000.00
Bahrain	Dinar	0.007.14	140.000.00
Kuwait	Dinar	0.005.56	180.000.00
Qatar	Riyal	0.071.43	14.000.00
Egypt	Pound	0.111.11	9.000.00
Jordan	Dinar	0.013.33	75.000.00
Lebanon	Pound	0.030.30	33.000.00
Taiwan	Dollar	0.625.00	1.600.00
Korea	Won	0.018.87	53.000.00
Brunei	Dollar	0.032.26	31.000.00
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000.00	0.00
Vietnam	Dong	0.000.00	0.00
Laos	Kip	0.000.00	0.00
Cambodia	Riel	0.000.00	0.00
Myanmar	Kyat	0.000.00	0.00
China	Renminbi	0.000.00	0.00
Bahrain	Dinar	0.000.00	0.00

Distributed by NewspaperDirect

Landbank forms 3 SPVs for asset sale

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE STATE-OWNED Land Bank of the Philippines has created three special purpose vehicles for the unloading of at least P17 billion worth of non-performing assets by October.

Landbank vice president for assets recovery group Omar Salvo said in a briefing the bank had decided to incorporate three SPVs with the Securities and Exchange Commission to give them flexibility in disposing of the assets.

The creation of multiple SPVs means that Landbank and its financial adviser, Ernst & Young, may choose to sell the assets in various tranches.

Banks are not allowed to own a controlling interest in SPVs. For the purpose of meeting the deadline to avail itself of the fiscal incentives offered by the SPV law, however, Landbank has decided to pre-register and capitalize the SPVs to be used prior to the Sept. 18 statutory deadline.

The planned transaction structure will consist of an outright purchase of a 95-percent interest in the non-performing asset pools by the winning bidders while Landbank plans to retain a 5-percent stake.

Of the assets to be bid out, Salvo said P14 billion consisted of non-performing loans while P3 billion were real and other properties owned and acquired.

Salvo said the due-diligence audit by the pre-qualified bidders started last Thursday.

"The target auction date is last week of October. A number of parties have registered for the due diligence," Salvo said.

Asked how confident the bank was in selling the assets through the SPV framework, Salvo said: "We have worked hard in trying to come up with a good portfolio and I think we have a good set of assets to be bid out."

The transaction portfolio offered by the bank consists of about 100 accounts, which are a combination of large corporate non-performing loans and foreclosed assets. There were about 250 collateral and settled assets.

Financial adviser E&Y, on behalf of Landbank, has solicited the support of multilateral lenders Asian Development Bank and International Finance Corp. to lower the cost for the NPL buyer through a third party acquisition financing. This means that through ADB and IFC's private sector lending windows, a loan could be provided to the successful bidders usually amounting to half of what the buyers are willing to pay for the assets.

The SPV Law of 2002 intends to help banks get rid of their NPAs by waiving some of the taxes and reducing fees usually collected in the sale or transfer of assets. The law waived the documentary stamp tax, capital gains tax and e-VAT (expanded value-added tax) and likewise reduced the registration/transfer fees by 50 percent.

The tax reliefs and other benefits are available only up to April 8, 2005.

Landbank, the country's third biggest bank in terms of assets, posted a net income of P1.35 billion from January to July this year compared to the P1.24 billion posted during the same period last year.

RP far . . .

From page B I

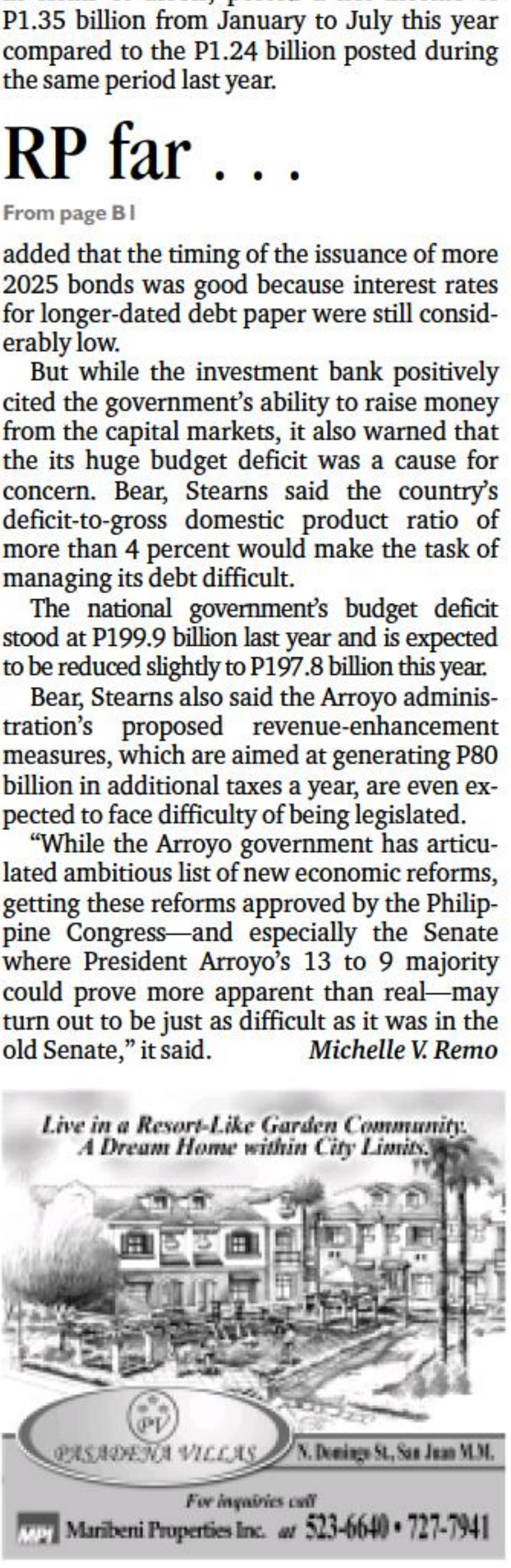
added that the timing of the issuance of more 2025 bonds was good because interest rates for longer-dated debt paper were still considerably low.

But while the investment bank positively cited the government's ability to raise money from the capital markets, it also warned that the its huge budget deficit was a cause for concern. Bear, Stearns said the country's deficit-to-gross domestic product ratio of more than 4 percent would make the task of managing its debt difficult.

The national government's budget deficit stood at P199.9 billion last year and is expected to be reduced slightly to P197.8 billion this year.

Bear, Stearns also said the Arroyo administration's proposed revenue-enhancement measures, which are aimed at generating P80 billion in additional taxes a year, are even expected to face difficulty of being legislated.

"While the Arroyo government has articulated ambitious list of new economic reforms, getting these reforms approved by the Philippine Congress—and especially the Senate where President Arroyo's 13 to 9 majority could prove more apparent than real—may turn out to be just as difficult as it was in the old Senate," it said. *Michelle V. Remo*



DOF on P1-B loss: It's how market works

By Michelle V. Rosca

IT IS just how the market works, said outgoing mate.

The Department of Finance (DOF) yesterday rejected insinuations that the government allowed the loss of P1 billion in the latest sovereign bond issue by selling RoP (Republic of the Philippines) debt papers at a higher discount.

The DOF explained that the movement of bond prices was market-determined.

Finance Undersecretary Eric Rivera, the man in charge of foreign borrowings, said Qué on Sept. 7, the government met the commissioner for the bond issue, that the pricing of the bonds were made. On Sept. 8, the cost of borrowings here became more expensive at 99.29 for bonds maturing in 2015, and 107.125 for debt papers maturing in 2025.

On Sept. 8, 1-day after the bonds were priced, the government was able to sell $300 million worth of bonds maturing in 2035, and $700 million worth of bonds maturing in 2020, for a total of $1 billion.

The government was able to sell the bonds at a more expensive rate of 99 percent for the 2035 bonds and 106.25 percent for the 2020 bonds, or as much as a percentage point discount.

"It is a normal market reaction that borrowings become more expensive after an enormous amount of a bond issue is made because you are giving them more supply," Rivera explained.

He added that the discount given by the government in the latest bond issue should not be regarded as because it has been giving the same amount of discounts in its past bond issues.

Rivera also compared the latest 2015 bond issue with the one held last March 16 and the 2035 bonds fetched a yield rate of 9 percent in March, and a rate of 9.37 in the bond issue over a week ago. He said that the 0.3 basis-point deterioration was slight compared with the 50-basis point increase in US interest rate that happened between March and September.

The Senate committee on finance, in a budget hearing the other day, questioned Finance officials on the pricing of the bonds, saying that the country already has one of the most expensive cost of borrowing in the region.

Legislators raised the concern that banks might prefer investing in attractively priced RoP bonds, rather than engage in lending to businesses. Legislators said that this, in effect, would reduce the available money for trading and hamper economic activity.

The banks already hold a substantial number of bonds.

Rivera, who was not present during the budget hearing, said he was willing to face the Senate and answer any query about the latest bond issue, which was succeeded by the government bifurcated Power Corp.

Of the P1 billion generated from the bond issue, $700 million would be used to pay Napocor's liabilities to independent power producers. The remaining $300 million would be used by the national government for its own financing requirement until year.

Reacting to comments that the government should have waited until bond prices become cheaper before making the issue, Rivera said the government had to sell the bonds immediately to avoid competition and an expected increase in US interest rates.

He said countries like Brazil, Turkey, Gross and Korea, among others, are also set to make a bond issue this month and in October. He added that the US Federal Reserve is expected to raise its interest rates by another 25 basis points when the Federal Open Market Committee meets on Sept. 20.

Duty Free marks rebound in sales

DUTYFree Philippines ranked best a losing venture to a profitable concern under the watch of Richard Eke. DFP gained strongest since 2000.

The DFP is an awarded agency of the Philippine Tourism Authority, the unit implementing the projects of the Department of Tourism.

In an accomplishment report for the 2004-2005, Eke showed that the DFP posted net incomes of P430.3 million in 2004, P320 million in 2003 and P920 million last year.

The figures represented a full turnaround from losses of P920 million incurred in 1997, P1.131 billion in 1998, P600 million in 1999 and P223 million in 2000.

The 1 percent sales increase in 2002, the first since 1990, was the result of continuing efforts aimed at enhancing core, increasing profitability, improving store layouts, and introduction of new products and merchandising focus.

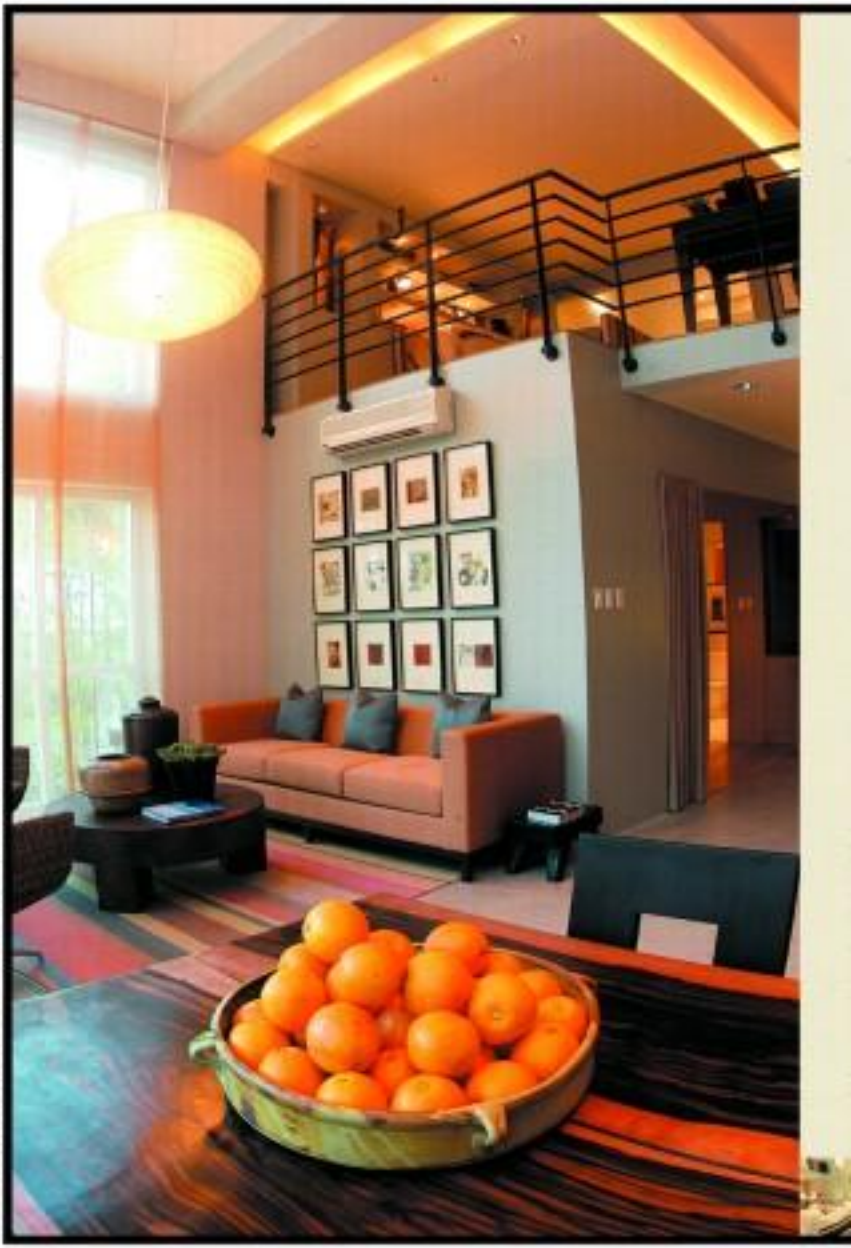
Their efforts paid off, Eke said, when Duty Free Philippines was recognized Duty Free Retail Travel Retail Operator Operating in a Single Country during the 2004 Tax Free World Association Congress held in Singapore.

Eke said they had to restructure their debt burden with major creditors, settling high-interest-bearing loans to reduce their debt from P4.4 billion in 2001 to P3 billion in June 2004.

Interest charges were likewise lowered from P240 million in 2001 to some P120 million in 2004.

Prompt payment to suppliers and consignees resulted in volume-and-discounts of P192 million in 2002, P328 million last year and P363 million in the first half of this year, Eke said.

Eke said they had achieved their marketing efforts turned the Filipino traveler with its changing shopping habits. The DFP said DFP first capitalized the passing of Republic Act No. 9174 or the New Bakhawan Law, which amended the Bakhawan's duty free privileges in November 2002. The Bakhawan Filipino travelers will have a month to do their duty-free shopping.



THAT'S AMORE
An engineer of the Alliance for Mindanao Off-grid Renewable Energy (AMORE) puts on the finishing touches to the installation of a lighting system in one of the household-ready townhouses in Barangay Pakian, Bukidnon, Magsaysay-area. The Amore project aims to put up power generation units in remote villages in the southern Philippines.

Coco oil export seen to double in '04

By Christine Guglicot

THE COUNTRY'S export of virgin coconut oil may be more than double this year due to the growing demand for the product in the United States.

According to Pedro P. Montemayor Jr., president of the Virgin Coconut Oil Producers and Traders Association of the Philippines, the country exported a total of 1,00,000 litres of the product in 2003. He said this as of July this year, exports of virgin coconut oil already passed the 800,000-liter mark.

There are now 20 virgin coconut oil producers and manufacturers in the country. The Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) recently decided to establish quality standards for the manufacturers to bolster their competitiveness.

PCA Administrator Benito Gozon said that interim standards that would serve as working references for the producers and consumers would soon be put in place.

"That would send a message that the industry is serious in seeking acceptable standards to ensure that bad practices are weeded out," said Gozon.

He added that fixed quality standards would also prevent manufacturers from cutting short cuts in their processes and do away with product tampering.

"We have seen that happen with our take-in-cone products before and the potentials of the industry were never realized because of poor management," PCA Deputy Administrator Carlos Calipo said.

The Department of Science and Technology, the Science departments of the University of the Philippines in Diliman and Los Baños, and the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Product Standards, are leading joint consultations with the private sector and the PCA.

Aside from the US market, the country currently delivers virgin coconut oil to Singapore, Japan and Korea.

Extracted from fresh mature coconut meat or the dehydrated coconut milk and coconut milk residue, or what is known as "copra" in the raw material by mechanical or natural means, with or without the application of heat. Manufacturers claim that raw virgin oil contained nutritional properties.

The oil contains no fat and cholesterol, he said.

Montemayor also said that the virgin oil could be eaten as is food or it only supplements like liquid vitamin. It could also be used as cooking oil, food ingredient, or food seasoning.

He added virgin oil could also be used to heal known fatal wounds, skin allergies and viral or fungal infections.

There's plenty of headroom

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And nobody else has this but us.

Vertical clearance: 20 ft. high

The world's tallest man is (and we mean that 7 ft. tall) a physical marvel that's quite common for the Watusi of Africa. Impressive as it may seem, we didn't design our lofts for our tall people.

We made our lofts lovely lofts for you to have fun for years to come. In case you scroll the years ever continue. Bring him; each loft will become your stairmaster—your own huge canvas.

Creativity can't be boxed.

This is your only chance to unleash the repressed artist in you. No other high-rise has lofts that can give you as much freedom for self-expression. Every room, every alcove, every nook and cranny can be your mural, your portfolio, your inspiration or your atelier.

And space is stimulant for productive minds. There's nothing here to cramp your style. And your changing moods.

Creativity must be nurtured.

And that's why we take care of the headaches. We give you a departure from the standard Rockwell is a little city that's surrounded. Traffic is not associated here. Security runs 24-hours daily. In a town of twenty-twenty, that's one less worry.

Despite the peace, we rock. There is always something clever like surprising craziness that changes the skyline every now and then. See its succinct bargain hunters as well as designer shops, traditional and quirky bars, restaurants and international events plus a global choice of entertainment and have for a diverse lifestyle.

The season rule here.

The choice is yours—from 1 to 2 bedroom units for the lofts. Or lofts into our towers' sprawling interiors, luxuriated floors, oversized kitchens. You're calling windows and walls to choose. Preferences, then according to the times. In your and mine you.

Jump on floors up, you can down in our skylounge or "The Wind". At the garden encased gym, 3 badminton courts, organic spa, children's playground, sandcastle, and garden and 25-metre swimming pool, you can tune for or angst. And be glad.

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Cigarette maker backs specific excise tax

PHILIP Morris Philippines Inc. yesterday thanked that an additional specific excise tax on cigarettes was a better way to raise additional government revenues from the industry rather than resorting to the ad valorem system of taxation.

Jaime Bautista, managing director Chito Bellen said in a statement that the specific excise tax system, on the one hand, would be easier to administer and would provide a stable and predictable income for the government. On the other hand, he added, the cigarette industry has always said that "consistently obtained by certain manufacturers is considered paying correct taxes."

The official said the company was supporting fair and moderate increases in the excise tax on cigarettes, which would address the concerns of both the government and cigarette industry.

Also, Bellen commented about changes that PHILIP MORRIS has proposed would effectively tax low and medium priced brands.

"Why would we do that?" he said. "We equally have a stake in [the] market segments."

PHILIP MORRIS has been bought for about P1 billion during Senator Estrada's time, father of the late-period brands Bowling Gold, Bowling Green, Hilltop and Hope.

The firm also increased production the mid-priced 'Mild, a brand under Philip Morris International.

PHILIP MORRIS is proposing a P1 per pack hike to raise for all brands, which is expected to bring P4.5 billion for the government.

San Fernando Tobacco Corp. and association of Virginia-American Tobacco Corp.- makers of low and medium priced brands— said on Thursday that PHILIP MORRIS' proposal would result in a 350-percent increase in the taxes for their brands and only 18 percent increase for their rival's high priced brands.

Dave Gomez, PMFI's public affairs and communications manager, said the tax system they favor is for percentages would result in huge increases in the tax because of the higher tax base.

Instead, he proposed a specific excise tax system.

BUSINESS

Asiana to get more flights to Clark

By Clarissa S. Bautista

SEOUL-based carrier Asiana Airlines will be given additional flights to Clark airport in line with the Arroyo administration's efforts to spur economic activity in the former American air base.

Transport Secretary Leandro Mendoza said the government would soon hold talks with the Korean government to improve the Philippine-Korea air services agreement. A favorable agreement would call for more flights between the Philippines and Korea.

"We plan to give the Korean government additional frequency entitlements. We expect that they will also give us additional entitlements," said the transport chief.

Asiana currently operates only charter flights to Clark five times a week. A regular passenger flight will have to be approved by the Civil Aeronautics Board.

It also flies seven times a week to Manila and twenty-two cargo flights a week.

Of the 17 flights a week planned by the government to Korean carriers, Asiana announced for eight flights while Korean Air got nine.

Asiana said it was expecting a 14 percent increase in tourist arrivals from South Korea this year to about 800,000, from 358,000 in 2003.

Asiana regional manager Pyeon Il Kim said the Korean carrier was planning to increase its flights to the Philippines by the fourth quarter to maintain a 35-percent share in the tourist arrivals from Korea.

Banks' NPL ratio rising

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE CHAIRMAN's commercial banks posted a higher ratio of non-performing loans to total loans for the second straight month in July.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas yesterday reported that the NPLs of universal and commercial banks by the end of July rose to 15.02 percent of total loans from 13.77 percent as of end-June. In May, the banks' NPL ratio to total loans was placed at 13.33.

But the BSP noted that the end-July level still reflected an improvement of 1.46 percentage points from the 16.48 percent a year ago.

"The slight increase in the month's NPL ratio was mainly due to the 1.2 percent contraction in lending that outpaced the 0.1 percent or P260-million decline in NPLs," the BSP reported.

But of nine bank loans, the NPL ratio went up to 16.54 percent in July from 16.41 percent in June. However, this was better than the 17.97 percent ratio in the same period a year ago.

As of end-July, the sector's total real and other properties owned and acquired (Repos) amounted to P287.11 billion as against gross assets of P3.64 trillion.

The ratio of Repos to gross assets barely changed to 3.7 percent from 3.68 percent a month ago. This was because the rate of reduction in gross assets outpaced the reduction in Repos.

Restructured loans as a ratio of total loans also went down by 0.15 percentage points to 7.58 percent from 7.73 percent last month, as the restructured loans fell by 2.7 percent.

Of the total restructured loans, the share of non-performing loans rose by 4.34 percent to 34.53 percent, from 30.19 percent last month. Non-performing restructured loans went up by 1.7 percent to P73.11 billion.

The industry's non-performing assets—which represent the NPLs and the Repossessed properties in 12-31 percent from 13.29 percent last month.

In the meantime, the 58% coverage ratio—which measures the amount of loan loss reserves as a ratio of NPAs—narrowed to 53.44 percent from 62.56 percent last month.

The NPL coverage ratio settled at 52.99 percent, down from 53.46 percent in June.

The BSP expects the sector's 80% ratio to improve significantly as banks take aggressive measures in disposing their assets to meet the deadline for the Special Purpose Asset Vehicle law.

The SPV Law intends to help banks get rid of their non-performing assets by giving them tax breaks.

Two more power plants to be sold

THE POWER Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. (PSALM) will bid out two more National Power Corp. hydroelectric plants this month—the 1.2-megawatt (MW) Loboc plant in Bohol and the 400-kilowatt Cantaguit plant in Negros.

PSALM vice president for asset valuation and disposal Froilan Tampinco said in a presentation before industry stakeholders yesterday that the Loboc plant would be auctioned off on Sept. 28 and the Cantaguit plant two days after.

Eleven investors, a mix of local and foreign firms, expressed interest in acquiring the Loboc hydroelectric plant, he said.

The Cantaguit hydroelectric plant, meanwhile, would be auctioned off to four interested investors, all local firms.

The Sept. 30 bidding for the Cantaguit plant would already be the second for the generation facility as the original auction was declared a failure.

Tampinco said the bidding was declared a failure because all bids fell short of PSALM's computed base price for the Negrense power station. —Abigail L. Ho

Masinloc plant bidding terms remain, says PSALM

By Abigail L. Ho

DESPITE still opposition from a number of foreign investors, the Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. (PSALM) will maintain the "right to match" provision in the bidding terms for the 600-megawatt (MW) Masinloc coal-fired power plant in Zambales.

PSALM vice president for asset valuation and disposal Froilan Tampinco said the provision would stay but PSALM was considering some modifications in the bidding terms.

PSALM's proposed modification, he said, would give prospective foreign bidders for the Masinloc plant more flexibility in forming consortia with local members.

Prospective bidders that will form consortia, he said, would be given ample time to conduct due diligence of the property with their potential partners.

Because of this, he said the Oct. 27 bidding schedule for the Masinloc plant might be pushed back.

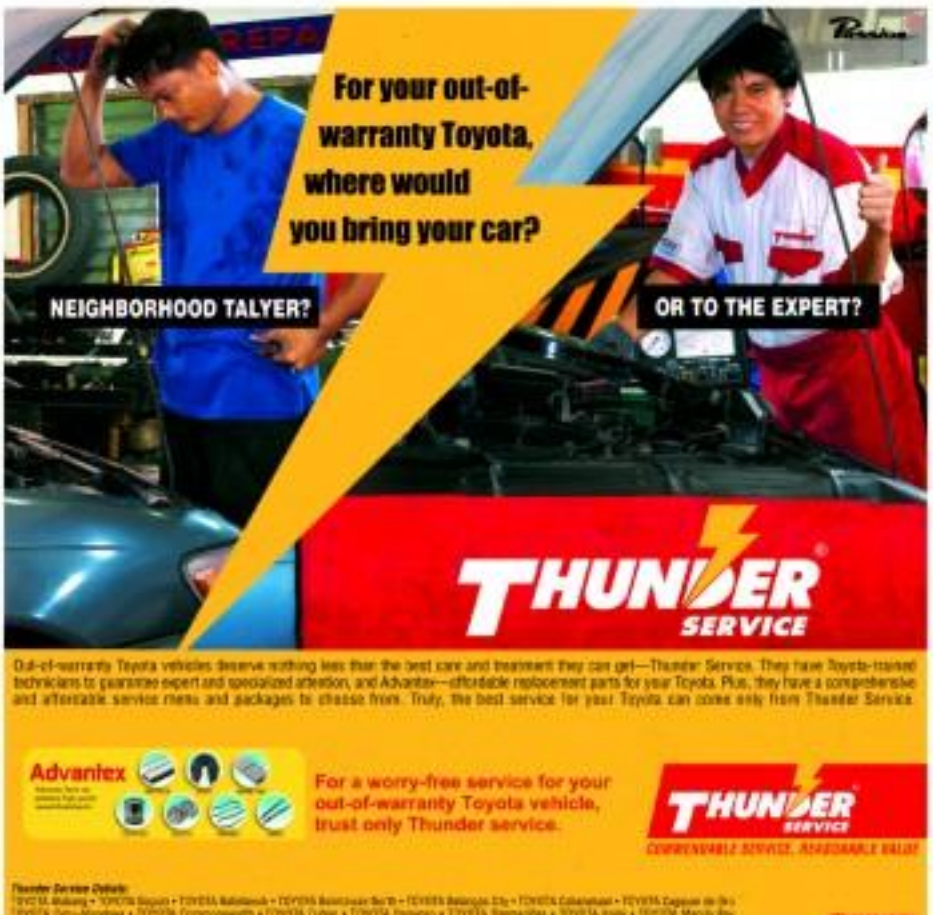
Foreign bidders are questioning the right to match provision in the bidding terms for the coal-fired plant as it will give Filipino bidders a chance to match the highest bid from a foreign firm.

If the local firm is able to match the foreign entity's bid, the asset will be awarded to the Filipino firm.

A government source earlier revealed that PSALM could not take that provision out of the bidding terms as doing so could result in negative repercussions in the future.

Like the Manila Hotel, the government official said the Masinloc plant had to be classified as part of "national patrimony to justify the provision.

"The Supreme Court has a habit of throwing monkey wrenches in to things. The government just has to make sure that the results [of the bidding] are beyond any legal question," the source said.



SATURDAY Super

A Little Geek Drama

THERE is a wonderful little holiday celebrated every month. It's akin to having Christmas twice a month for the working force, and it's called Pay Day. Say those two magic words and it's enough to elicit relieved sighs and beaming smiles for anyone plagued by monthly credit card bills, overdue rent, hunger pangs, and the constanting desire to de-stress via mistletoe shopping. It has become a regular tradition among my more corporate peers to map out their end-of-the-month splurging strategies to reward them for their assiduous workweeks at the "salt mines." New clothes, shoes, costly dinners at restaurants, CDs or coveted electronic playthings are usually on the list. Conglomerate department

OUT THE WINDOW

Tala Diaz

ENDURED Be wholly... MTV VJ Cindy Kurleto at St. James Palace in London, with no less than Prince Charles

Cindy Kurleto's date with Prince Charles

By Teo Yip

SO IS Cindy Kurleto giving Camilla Parker-Bowles a run for the money?

Well, she came close. At a fund raising for the Prince's Trust Foundation, our very own Cindy was among the 50 celebrities from around the world that was invited to the very exclusive affair held at St. James Palace.

Prince Trust is a fund raising organization which promotes young talents from the United Kingdom in different structures. They give concerts for industry insiders and sponsor an audition.

"I got invited because Jo Simon with their biggest sponsor pins I'm friends with some artists abroad," Cindy told Super! "They paid for everything...first class all the way." Cindy tells us about her recent London trip.

"It was very exciting and beautiful ratings ng Europe...kaya lang, the British have so many for style—at least not for that event," Cindy continues about her observations with regards to people who attended the charity event.

UK idol Australia Oh winner was there, too, as well as lots of European actors and musicians. The purpose wasn't all about us so who Cindy was. Then thought she was an Asian princess with her understated gown by Raja Lauret.

Cindy was the only one who was invited inside Prince Charles. She even joined Jo in the other celebrities or royalty persons was allowed to be near the crown princess of England.

Here's dear for a page one of Cindy Kurleto's princess charles?

Oh caption, my caption!

SUPER!'s caption: Or no be cria!

INSPIRATION SANDWICH

Fashion + art? X=actly!

JEN in gray short-sleeved polo, denim pants
Cat in sheer orange blouse and green shorts
Artwork: "Inmaculada Arabesque" by Jose Joya (oil on canvas)

JEN in dark blue long-sleeved button-down shirt
Artwork: "My Sister at Ole Sewing Machine" by Dante Corona Mabalis (pastels and sand on paper)

CAT in aqua sleeveless top and pink pants
Artwork: "New York City" by Ramon Estella

JEN in burgundy and white short-sleeved polo and khakis
Artwork: "Church on Silver" by Jose Joya (oil on canvas)

CAT in lime green blouse, white pants/jeans
Artwork: "Pangasa" by Manuel Rodriguez, Sr. (oil on canvas)

BUY BUY, BABY!

Lemon-aide

Giselle Segovia

WHAT'S your last price?

Thursday, September 23

Friday, September 24

Saturday, September 25

Sunday, September 26

Monday, September 27

Tuesday, September 28

Wednesday, September 29

The word for the bored:

A Little Geek Drama

Continued on A 2

stores have utterly caught on to this cyclist behavioral pattern by launching such irresistible promos tagged as midnight madness sales—which, by the way, are portents of even more maddening traffic jams in a metropolis populated by mall-crazy denizens.

The last straw from this year-ago day shopping habit, the interval of the semi-bookworm's life he ran over pairs of shoes and whole day ops (memories, I have jealous memory of shoes) as my lifelong addiction. They are things that alter the mind, take me on trips to far-flung regions, are highly addictive, consume chunkloads of cash and at times render me cross-hagged for days on end. They're called books.

The very instance I find a few more digits added to my bank account, I rip off immediately, and in solitude, to my personal haven in the bookstores. Bookshops in the city have become my sweeping, sacred sanctuaries where in—the grim dot hyperbole—I experience and sensually feel this unrelenting sense of power wash over me. To show my respect, I even show my cell phone for hours just so I won't be bothered by incessant text messages. I'd become as untouchable as a chip in the film movie "Blade." In fact, while in a store we are currently abroad, I've almost missed flights because I'd lose all sense of time browsing through the small bookshops in the streets. And when some genius changed the concept of time of my most favorite things in life—books and eat, fine—to a two-for-a-month version of a chop, it just proved the existence of God.

Early Chapters

I happily blame my mother for getting me hooked on the lifelong addiction. Most after my brother and I barely learned how to walk and talk, she would prepare flashcards of simple vocabulary words for me to learn how to pronounce correctly. As soon as I got the hang of reading simple words like "cat" and "hat" and "Beans," she soon moved on to rework more difficult words like "computer" and "rainbow" (the ones, after all, Jill Morikawa can't seem to learn how). Several of alphabetizing our mini toys and flashcards every birthdays and Christmas celebrations, my father would give me selected books. In fact, I still have "The Shining Star," the very first book he ever gave me, which I still read today! Children's books like

PAGE against the overtime. Hopelessly hooked on books!

"The Little Prince" was created in Aurelia on Antonia, then Nancy Drew stateside, or the Chronicles of Narnia. Even more than I'm in my memoirs, my family's, well, peculiar reading exercises with herself raised. My mom still keeps a red rock Anti-Dictionary by the dining table and asks me to search for more vocabulary words to learn to pronounce correctly. I got so hooked on books that in high school, when reading fiction wasn't exactly a hobby that made you the most popular kid in the campus social system, I was considerably tagged as a nerd. Call it a Geek tragedy if you will.

The Next Chapters

Then, a year after of a stint in a reality-like reading rock in high school, the things did get a lot better in college, where I met many more kick ass, I admit, Ateneo classmates who introduced whom my parents not all to mentioning are J.R.R. Tolkien, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Nikos Kazantzakis and Norman Mailer. I met my best friend because of a whole adventure dedicated to J.D. Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye." The two pen stores in all was also their books between classes during the marketing afternoons were never pseudo-intellectual, pretentious posing sessions. They were simply good, insightful moments in the chaos of college years in the spotlight, with young people swapping and lend names, dissolved lives, lives to write books, because plans that formed a kaleidoscope of experiences from friends who found solace and wisdom in printed words and somebody gave away clues about their personal life's beliefs and philosophies, loves, hates. I was on those moments moments we add the classmate, many times coming English class, that actually made me appreciate the poetry of life and living.

Fast forward to the present chapter, a.k.a. living in mid-adulthood in my late twenties, in a year long term relationship we where I'm still working along we also as called someone called we're dating. I have come to terms with the one flaw that comes from being a book worm all my life. I know all too well that you can't judge a book by its cover, but dammit, I end up judging how to the books that I read. Then, I discover gems like you I have with several four books star big heads still—then a week I see his shiny library for the first time in his apartment, filled with dog-eared and underlined books—and well, he's just my chair I now mobile to pee time down.

Epilogue

So, epilogue on the little Geek drama. A friend once commented, "Sheesh guys, a lot of people are working hard to get their bodies in shape, be toning, during jogging jobs ... but I think people should also read more to nourish their minds, too." I couldn't agree more. Personally I think a mind in good shape is just as important as

Email the author at text_prose@yahoo.com

LAUGH TRIP. Super! celebrate with the cast of "Wazzup! Wazzup!"

Super! WAZZUP! TRIVIA

Super! compiled random, thingamajiggy advice your favorite "Wazzup!" characters that go beyond the double-shoulder patting (the "Wazzup!" first order). From the fear of calamansi to a love of Chuck Taylors, here's a listing of authentic quirks that will surely make you scratch your head and say, "Wazzup! Wazzup!"

—Dan Ilag

Vhang Navarro

- Between takes, he loves to check jokes using the props around him.
- His fear is actually more than a fear. Here it comes: Ants.
- A Chuck Taylors aficionado.
- Can never get over your obsession with his "gansta" bag, as he calls it, or the etc. (his "gansta" actually just means "important").
- When he's in a shot, you get to see as little as he wants you to see as he is onscreen.

Tom Gonzaga

- Since their shoots last month (his DVD with Pinoy Pop-star Sweetnotes, "I Love You Pinoy!" Andrea Brillantes) was actually one of the girls with a temperamental streak.
- Has a phenomenal phobia of calamansi. Actually, anything sour will make him run away screaming. Also, he's afraid of ants, snakes, and scorpions (who isn't?).
- Was recently featured in an ad with Yeng Constantino, who's hosting along with Lucy's Boo Gomez & Gwen with a Media Preparation called.
- When asking to pronounce Gwen's name in front of the camera, insists he's not ready yet, acting out that person's part instead of him.

Drew Arellano

- Epitome of entrepreneur. He's owner of a pre-school, part-owner of a spa, and franchisee of billiards cafes.
- He used to be into breakdancing.

STRIKE A POSE. Here's looking at you...

SUPER! WAZZUP! hosts pose

- Loves eavesdropping on people.
- Favorite food: beef.
- Has two tattoos: one on his right arm and another on his back.
- Personality MOST TO his Villamin friends.
- Doesn't sleep. Tuesday nights, when he's onscreen at "Wazzup!" for live taping, then goes straight to "Bubong Diaz."

Archie Alemania a.k.a. "Hotdawgador"

- Used to be ordered "with cheese" by his fans.
- Like Vhang, loves chess. Archie is actually so good, part of UAAP's Ateneo.
- Nights for "Hotdawgador" shenanigans, he's in private session with his psychiatrist of Mr. Bean.

Mitch Hernandez a.k.a. "E-Pal"

- Has several photos on his cell phone.
- Always has jovially performed runs with first-time guests.

Jojo Bolivar a.k.a. "Edison"

- Was interrupted by "Live Judy," an award show put together by members of DP Edukasyon Network.
- Apparently has a proper handler!

Ketchup Eusebio a.k.a. "Banana Ketchup"

- Real name is Michael Eusebio.
- Known to give sweet hugs to Jeff Arellano "Banana Ketchup" Cruz for appearances on a talk.
- Plays a guy obsessed in ABS-CBN's TV series, "Tonging Tonz."

Beads de la Cruz a.k.a. "Wallace"

- Member of UP repertory.
- Speaks perfect Tagalog on "Wazzup!" but actually has no idea what the heck he's talking about.
- His look is actually slightly "Wallace" but personality-wise, he's totally opposite. Calm—but maybe he's cringing.

Bianca Valerio a.k.a. "Beyoncy Kempadoro"

- Learned almost all his Tagalog words on "Wazzup!"
- Claims to be a certified pinay but really is an Ellis Island in disguise.
- Can actually sing and used to be in school.
- Was the world record in on the Guinness Book of World's Tallest Toddler in the World 2005.

Bianca Gonzalez a.k.a. "Campus Correspondent"

- Has a vast collection of Chuck Taylors.
- Admits she's not super! skilled.
- Member of ABS-CBN's Campus Development Group (CDG).

The 'jologs' in me

By Bianca Valeria

Whoever said that a Brazilian wax has to be the most liberating experience has obviously never been a "Tad Jeeb?"

An avenue for the gift of gab, giving out the hours for sportsmanship goodwill with the use of charming mockery and conjured humorous logic, "Tad Jeeblog" has definitely got to its third season. "Is Yaya there during A-Blast?" ask them it.

The first-ever news gag show, Studio 23's "Wazzup! Wazzup!" is officially on its third season.

Currently the show's fashion and events correspondent, a.k.a. "Everyone Remembers" for the "Funniest Anecdotes?" segment, I get to cover events that deal with my chosen profession but even better: I get to mock them!

Aside from being introduced with fashion philosophies and over-analyzing the essence of a tweed jacket for years, please, there's just really so much you can say about a-line jacket. My characters, however, saying to morpan Anne Curtis' fashion expertise just basically means one to be Carrie Top shelving my one-liner, all for the re-collections of fashion.

Wazzup, showbiz?

Although I'm having my solo now, it wasn't always this way.

I somewhat had to believe, it's so ironic that my route to deeper self-discovery was directed towards the indispensible cynical world of show biz: an industry where everything is a montage of fabricated characters to be consumed by TV viewers in constant need of eye-candy.

I had made a solemn vow to myself from a young age that show biz would be my very last career option. Bit in a gallant effort to expand my horizons in the field of entertainment, I ate my words with a foaming wine that drained all my self-confidence.

Hair-to-fair weathered

Fate sure had a way of bringing it on when I first landed the part of Heather Cid "Lucy" Jim Lucena on "Whazzup" along with two other characters. Hey played by Jaja Gonzales and Mindy played by Carla Humphries, our characters reported weather that made absolutely no sense while dressed in distastefully ill-fitting and, in some, provocative costumes to avoid looking mundane.

Her portrayal of my conceivable character there was in pop culture. Gwen Madonna to the 90s to a mannequin. Lou we forget the matching choreography that defined all theories of self-dignity was the pièce de résistance of our segments.

I imagined it to be the job of my dreams. It sure was , of my sight-named. It was more of a punch in the face than the punch line I was counting on. How I was at the prime of my modeling career dancing every imaginable glamorous look there was on Vegas and hosting hip, social-events one night...

And then, there I was with a gigantic flared head dress, squeezing my cheeks together depicting an overly pin-infested elk desperately trying to pop itself, shacked up in some green spandex (the greatest sin for name-of fashion), dancing and singing to the Viva Hot Babes' "Bahalla" as primetime!

From lame to shame

My supposed 15 minutes of fame had blatantly turned out to be 15 blisters of Shame seven days a week for three months.

I had run wards to describe my career: schizophrenic and ironic.

I was consumed with so much self-doubt that quitting at that time was the best and only option. Pitch the cans and erase measure. I cried in the dressing room nearly every single day. Jaja and Carla unconditionally shared their heartfelt support and "I've been there" when I shared show biz" stories, which slowly but surely put me at ease.

How I saw it now then, playing Lucy's role was an indirect way of confronting, "Yes, I am a model and I am dumb—no double this is the only role I can play..."

All my friends in the modeling industry believed I was having the time of my life with my new job but only my family and managers, Kenni Pascual, knew what was really going on in my head. However, these things made everything change. First, my dad said, "There are many things that are beyond your control but the one thing that you can control is your attitude."

My alter ego

Pitch fell me to the ground. Recognized, I realized everything in life is a choice. If life decides to throw you a fastball, it's not about hitting home; it's about how you caromed off the bases.

Walking away would've been the easiest, easy-fix, risk-free and cowardly way of handling the situation but in choosing to see it as a curve ball I had to carry in order to grow, in a literal flash, my so-called damning problems drifted right past me.

As the cast became closer to one another and I had been reassigned to be a field reporter, things started to look up. It was then I yearned to reconnect with another side of myself. I never knew actually existed: It was the "jologs" in me, a.k.a. my alter ego. It made me reawaken and love myself in a whole new, enlightening way.

So much so, I remain the old me but two weights say, repackaged and reconstituted. Just when I found the joy in being shallow, was also when I found myself. I had learned to let go and let God.

Lately, as Kenni is known for his sporadic text-mass, what he told me was the deadline to end the deal: "Personal na lang you're Ashton Kutcher of 'Star 701 Show! He's not really stupid in real life but look where he is now! He's so rich, di ba?!" And that my friends, was the impossible realized, splashed with a dose of sarcasm and a shit of encouragement. (Sad I unveiled!

Now let's see if I can sub a theme of my own.

Pentel

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Go North, guys

By Oliver M. Palardoit
Contributor

SMILES LIKE GIFT PORN. 'Finish, Alf, Scott and Brent of North

This boy band is a conundrum born in the land of vegemite, kangaroos and 'Home and Away'

LET'S face it. Boy bands are hard to die. Ungainly from one another, they mostly suffer the fact that they all sing ably-to-sugary lyrics, mean suits-over-exercise haircut gestures and (post-)boy-band careers are practically fated at the outset.

These purveyors of pop platitudes (or point-boxes) unquestionably want our (or oneself) iconic hair from all over the planet in their sweaty bandanas in several years.

One of them, North, is a conundrum born in the land of vegemite, kangaroos and "Home and Away," declaring that they want to "break the mold, even if only slightly."

They went two hours late for the interview at Dunedin's El Red Bus Lounge, but that's understandable. They had to go through Dieter Bhandler's dreaded Friday afternoon traffic, after all. Still, the Aussie quartet comprised of Alf, Brent, Thumb and Scott, whose self-titled debut album was recently released in Asia, enthusiastically answered questions about their four-day promotional tour in the Philippines.

Asian pop

Like other all-male vocal groups, South East Asia seemingly mandated an immediate divide. Brunette Scott got the spunky guy cues; 90 Degrees Ian (the no-study one, and Blue has the black guy.

North has the Aussie, Thumb, who's of Vietnamese descent. Brent, and their moderately contrived cover of Peter Cetera's "Glory of Love," are perhaps the only two things that people know about them in the Thai's purely because the first-ever (a reference there 13-track album in their native Australia.

"Bands from Australia are mainly rock-focused because of the culture," says Alf, lyricist and producer. "We know Asia embraces pop music, so it just makes sense to release here first."

Group choreographer Brent, a former choreographer, adds, "Based on logistics alone, it makes perfect business sense. It's not go home and we're not tour from Each at home. It's cool, because we can still have peace and quiet."

So why of all venues, did they settle on the mainstream generic "North," after two years of deliberating?

"The name means 'going up,'" claims confessional rock-coach Thumb. "It's a very positive word. It's what we're all about. We're always improving ourselves." The group actually considered putting their initials together. But "S.T.A.B." or "B.A.T.S." didn't quite ring right.

They claim that their singles are but characteristic to Thailand and Indonesia, and that they can claim to their distinct sound and support.

To give an idea of how North sounds, they performed harmonious a cappella snippets of "Show of Love" and "Can I Touch You?" between questions. Alf also took the opportunity to play the aboriginal wind instrument didgeridoo, which the group hopes to integrate into its next batch of compositions.

Creative freedom

Ex-personal writers from oppressive the creative independent North is currently enjoying: "Me manufactured ourselves. A lot of pop acts have a strong creative team behind them. For me that creative team [members]. We write, produce, style, choreograph, design our CD covers...everything from A to Zed, really."

Brent notes that the boy band concept has evolved, and that North hopes changing tastes and attitudes will work in their favor.

"That's something we've always been worried, (for) timing," he says. "Our true boy bands are cool, the new, they sort of fade out. We're not a traditional boy band; the big difference is, we do things ourselves. We hope everyone listens and appreciates that."

Will North be a springboard for eventual solo projects, then? North looks at the possibilities realistically: "I think it would be silly to say that we wouldn't want to continue in individual careers in music, and this is probably a great launch pad. But one day can remember, one year at a time. We'll see where it goes. We're four buddies that get along great."

Those of North's songs aren't mushy love [illegible] "I Won't Hold Back" (about following one's dreams), "Silhouette To" (about crashing boots on the dance floor), and "Freak Me" (a double-entendre dance-track about, well, getting freaky). But love will always be a recurring theme in this and future albums, they say.

"The best songs are love ballads," Alf claims. "It makes emotions when you sing about relationships. Everyone's writing about it because everyone relates to it. Everyone's had a partner, or has been hurt. It's very difficult to make about something you haven't experienced. We're able to put words about personal experiences into paper quickly, and it sounds right."

Years after this debut, Alf hopes that North will be remembered worldwide as a strong vocal group that evolved double-hard to make world distance from its boy band brethren.

"Talent, writing music and being able to sing—it doesn't matter if you look good [or not]. Talent will always shine through in the end. And give people good music they can get into," he says.